

MIDDLE SCOTS HUMOROUS

NARRATIVE VERSE

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Examining diverse narrative poems in the Middle Scots literary tradition (c. 1450-1590), the thesis explores the nature of medieval humour (risible tales, satires, parodies, etc.) in relation to genre, literary conventions, comic techniques, intended audience, and function (the moral or didactic purpose, the relationship between entertainment and edification), with special reference to the kind of narrative each poem represents, the many varieties of story or mimetic transcript. I argue for a distinction between stories (basically, character-determined plots) and what I call mimetic transcripts. Briefly, mimetic transcripts may have many or all of the appurtenances of stories (e.g. characters, dialogue, action, sequential episodes) but lack a distinct peripeteia and often anagnorisis. Many satires, dream-visions, burlesques, and song-like or "situational" poems (debates, complaints, laments, etc.) are mimetic transcripts; most fabliaux, comic romances, and fables--even when incorporating satiric, parodic, or didactic materials--are stories. Narrative kind is closely bound up with a poet's purpose and techniques, and helps to account for poets' qualitative differences. For example, Henryson's major poems are all stories, broadly edifying. Dunbar and Lindsay almost never write stories but rather mimetic transcripts, which, usually peopled with characters who are animated by thematic instead of dramatic considerations, better lend themselves to topical satire. A large number of the extant humorous poems in Middle Scots are satiric mimetic transcripts.

PREFACE

Weigh in your hand several years of a life. Electing to pursue the degree of Ph.D. is rather like becoming one of Jahweh's Chosen People: if you knew beforehand what it actually entailed, you might hesitate in seeking the honour, for all its private satisfactions and glories. The world decays, felicity and misfortune smile alternately, friendships come and go, generations pass: yet through it all such study remains your central fact, your sun round which all life revolves, absorbing your substance, energy, and time; and--worse--severely trying the patience of long-suffering loved ones. But, like all exacting apprenticeships, it has been a challenging experience, one contributing to my ability to learn and stimulating, I hope, proper growth. If at times my task has seemed a chore, far oftener it has been a pleasure, one I would wish to share. I am delighted to have taken the opportunity, and would not have traded the experience "for a wilderness of monkeys."

Studies in Middle Scots language and literature have enjoyed a heartening surge of scholarly interest in recent years. But much still remains to be investigated: study of literary sources and influence-patterns, the cultural and historical background, textual and editorial problems (linguistics, authorship, dates); the assessment of the unique characteristics and the relative value of the extant works in relation to each other and in comparison with other literary traditions; and the application of interpretive criticism to neglected texts.

The existing scholarship gap is especially evident in regard to works by anonymous, single-attribution, or little-known authors, those

anonymous or dubiously assigned poems that make up a large proportion of contributions to the Middle Scots tradition. In many cases these poems have not yet been properly edited, at least in this century, nor fully investigated. Only three of the authors I propose to exam, Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, and Sir David Lindsay, are major poets with substantial canons and accordingly substantial critical followings. The other poets and works, admittedly few of the same consistently high calibre as either Henryson or Dunbar, have received little if any significant attention. Critics of Early and Middle Scots have largely concentrated on the major figures, John Barbour, James I, Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, Blind Harry, Gavin Douglas, and Sir David Lindsay; although a few critical articles have also appeared on anonymous major poems like The Thre Prestis of Peblis or Christis Kirk of the Grene, as well as a growing variety of Middle Scots topics.

For the most part, however, anonymous or minor poems in Middle Scots literature have been only briefly examined in sweeping surveys of the period by nineteenth and twentieth literary historians. Typically, they provide a few general remarks, as little as a sentence to a paragraph, and perhaps a recapitulation of the poem's content. Maurice Lindsay's History of Scottish Literature, (London: 1977), is the latest in a long line of broad historical surveys, and exemplifies the summary technique so often employed: the poems Rauf Coilyear, The Colkelbie Sow, "The Gyre Carling," "King Berdok," Christis Kirk of the Grene, and Peblis to the Play are dismissed in a matter of thirteen pages (pp. 24-37), wherein the bulk of his discussion is devoted to recounting the poems' plots supplemented by brief historical notes. Even the major Middle Scots poets fare little better under his scrutiny. Such is an inevitable limitation of this kind of book. What

are needed are critical studies of greater depth covering a more limited period. Part of my present purpose will be to rectify this deficiency to a small degree, to provide, within the context of this dissertation, some necessary source and relations study and more rigorous critical analyses than have been hitherto afforded many of these texts. This is an explanation of, though not an apology for, the length of this study.

My debts of gratitude are many; and this book, accompanied by my deepest appreciation of those who made it possible, an insufficient recompense. I welcome the opportunity to thank the Librarians and staff of the University of Edinburgh Library, the National Library of Scotland, the British Library in London, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, for their considerate assistance. I was pleased to learn paleography from Professor Gordon Donaldson; to receive advice on linguistic matters from Mr. A.J. Aitken; and to discuss historical and textual points with Professor Denys Hay, Dr. Ian Cowan, Professor Denton Fox, and especially Dr. Ian W.A. Jamieson. Dr. Flora Alexander of the University of Aberdeen very kindly gave me the typescript of a paper on Rauf Coil-year which proved instructive. I am very grateful for the University of Edinburgh's award of a 2-year Postgraduate Studentship, which included necessary travel grants for study in such foreign places as France and England. I am likewise greatly indebted to the Scottish Arts Council for its timely award of a Writer's Bursary in 1979. The receipt of these grants enabled me to finish the dissertation, and they were worth much more to me than their considerable cash value. And I would be remiss indeed if I did not also register my deep appreciation of Pollock Halls of Residence, which in its mercy sheltered

and fed me and mine in exchange for some trifling services rendered. I benefited from the arrangement far more than Lee House ever did; and I cherish the friendships made during my tenure there.

What I owe to Dr. Ronald D.S. Jack and Professor John MacQueen, my thesis supervisors, cannot adequately be told. Always generous with their time and ideas, they made scholarship an adventure. Professor MacQueen once remarked, after several hours of exploratory argument and friendly disagreement, that "this thesis represents a meeting of minds." I agree. But it was much a case of my mind straining upward, and theirs stooping helpfully down. Throughout these past five years they have both shown me wisdom, kindness, encouragement, patience, un-failing good humour, and an implacable professionalism. They have, in short, been friends as well as teachers. Their suggestions have been invaluable; and they have often assisted me in ways beyond those which duty assured. My especial thanks to Dr. Jack, who suffered me gladly during many, many hours of consultation. I owe them much more than the profound love, respect, and gratitude I bear them.

My debts of gratitude are many. But my greatest debt I owe to my wife, Delia. And it is to her that I dedicate, with love, this book.

R.P.W.

June, 1981

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Asloan</u>	<u>The Asloan Manuscript</u> , ed. W.A. Craigie, 2 vols., STS New Ser. 14, 16, (Edinburgh & London: 1923-25).
<u>Bannatyne</u>	<u>The Bannatyne Manuscript</u> , ed. W. Tod Ritchie, 4 vols., STS New Ser. 22, 23, 26, 3rd Ser. 5, (Edinburgh & London: 1928-34).
<u>Chaucer</u>	<u>The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer</u> , ed. F.N. Robinson, 2nd ed., (Boston & New York: 1957).
<u>DOST</u>	<u>Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue</u> , ed. W.A. Craigie and A.J. Aitken, 4 vols. (in progress), (Chicago & London: 1931+).
<u>Dunbar</u>	<u>The Poems of William Dunbar</u> , ed. James Kinsley, (Oxford: 1979).
EETS, E.S., O.S.	Early English Text Society, Extra Series, Original Series.
<u>Henryson</u>	<u>The Poems of Robert Henryson</u> , ed. Denton Fox, (Oxford: 1981).
<u>JEGP</u>	<u>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</u>
<u>Lindsay</u>	<u>The Works of Sir David Lindsay</u> , ed. Douglas Hamer, 4 vols., STS 3rd Ser. 1, 2, 6, 8, (Edinburgh & London: 1931-36).
<u>Maitland Folio</u>	<u>The Maitland Folio Manuscript</u> , ed. W.A. Craigie, 2 vols., STS New Ser. 7, 20, (Edinburgh & London: 1919-27).
<u>OED</u>	<u>Oxford English Dictionary</u> , 13 vols., (Oxford: 1933).
<u>PMLA</u>	<u>Publications of the Modern Language Association</u>
<u>SSL</u>	<u>Studies in Scottish Literature</u>
STS	Scottish Text Society

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PART I: FOUNDATIONS

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Much of the secular Middle Scots literature that survives is humorous in nature, comically entertaining. Much of it also attempts to teach a moral lesson or offer social criticism. Poems on basic human interests, such as love, or concerned with society's perennial problems came to form established literary traditions, recognized genres with set conventions that an artist could use or vary at his pleasure. Of course, when choosing to write in a particular genre poets necessarily made choices as to form and structure as well: specifically, the various kinds of structures peculiar to lyric, narrative, or drama. Choice of structure and choice of genre are of equal significance in shaping the finished poem, and affecting the reader's response to it.

The present investigation is concerned with narrative structure and literary genre in relation to poetic technique and purpose, with special reference to satire in Middle Scots. I shall argue that narrative kind and genre usually determine a poet's purposes and techniques, and help to account for poets' qualitative differences. In order to render the topic manageable this thesis will be restricted to samples of comic verse narratives, risible stories and mimetic transcripts dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Even within these parameters it is impractical to attempt to include all extant humorous Middle Scots narrative poems. Instead, the discussion will consider examples of the various types of humorous verse narratives: fables, fabliaux, burlesques, parodies, satires, "songs," and comic fantasy tales (e.g. "The Gyre Carling"). The chapters, then, even those on Henryson and Dunbar, will be based largely on generic divisions.

The arrangement of chapters based on genre, however, is far from inflexible. I am constrained to point out at the beginning that the diverse nature of the material hinders a neat, compartmentalized organization. The poems in question differ in kind, are unique even within their own genres, are not composed by a single author, nor were they written within a relatively small compass of time and space but come from various regions of Scotland and embrace roughly a one hundred year period. The ordinary method of defining a topic--by single genre, author, and/or period--are inapplicable. A concise, unified approach is therefore impossible to achieve.

The dissertation is divided into three parts. The first part introduces essential background materials, including brief definitions of the period, of narrative kinds, of humour and comedy, and medieval ideas on the risible. The second and third parts treat of stories proper and mimetic transcripts respectively, broadly arguing for the existence of such a division, exploring their distinctive qualities, and drawing conclusions about their various achievements and limitations as humorous literature. The divisions overlay the discussion of individual works by genre. But because the chapters are arranged by genre some interplay is unavoidable, so that a tale may be found among the mimetic transcripts and vice versa. In general, however, the divisions hold up well, and the poems fall largely into two camps: that of Henryson, the fabulists and fabliards; and the other of Dunbar, the comic lyricists and satirists.

The nature of the thesis, due to the existing scholarship gap and its special area of critical interest, is in equal measure exploratory and argumentative. The investigation will close with a discussion of characteristic Middle Scots modes, themes, and rhetorical techniques;

"standard jokes"; moral and recreational purposes of the tales; and an evaluation of the aesthetic differences between stories and mimetic transcripts.

i. Background

It is first necessary to supply needed historical, textual, and critical information, to delineate some of the problems and define terminology. The term "Middle Scots" in this dissertation's title requires explanation, for it raises the problem of "medieval" Scottish letters. Consonant with Scotland's turbulent early history, the pattern of manuscript survival points to a strong and continuous oral and "folk" tradition but the rather late flowering of a substantial written Scottish literature. The Scottish vernacular literary tradition effectively begins with John Barbour's The Bruce.¹ Written in Early Scots,² The Bruce was composed in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, at roughly the time of Langland, Chaucer and Gower's early work, and possibly the Gawain-poet; that is, in concert with the birth of early modern English literature. Like the Chanson de Roland and El Cid, The Bruce is an epic romance celebrating the historic adventures of a national hero, pointing to an age of national pride; it is an act of national consciousness.

Scotland's prolific and distinctive literature springs from this

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1. John Barbour, The Bruce, ed. Walter W. Skeat, 2 vols., STS 1st Ser. 31, 32, (London: 1893-95), I, xxxi. The date of composition is probably 1375. The poem is currently being re-edited for the STS by Matthew P. MacDiarmid and James A.C. Stevenson.
 2. The Early Scots language and Middle Scots are marked off roughly in the reign of James II, about 1450. See James A.H. Murray, The Dialect of the Southern Counties of Scotland, (London & Berlin: 1873), 29-51; and G. Gregory Smith, Specimens of Middle Scots, (Edinburgh & London: 1902), xii-xvii. The Bruce, James I's Kingis Quhair, The Legends of the Saints, and The Buik of Alexander are major works in Early Scots.

powerful beginning. It flowers in the aureate age of James III (1451-88) and especially James IV (1473-1513), then begins to wither during the Reformation to the merest stalk of its fifty years or so of turn-of-the-century glory.³ Although Scottish poets wrote in "Ingliss," and even felt themselves heirs to the English tradition in praising Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate,⁴ their language was also recognized as being distinct from the "Sudron" speech of their neighbours.⁵ But with the replacement of Catholicism by Protestantism, marked by the advent of the vernacular Bible, hymnals, metrical psalters, and other cheaply printed books imported from England into Scotland, Scotland's court-oriented literature declined; and the language--at least in print--gradually anglicised. Scottish printers slowly adopted English orthography, not least out of a sense of "country cousin" embarrassment. King James VI himself signals the collapse of Middle Scots as a distinct literature. Early in his reign he tried to ensure that the

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3. We know from Dunbar's "Timor Mortis Conturbat Me" the names of several fifteenth century poets whose work does not survive, or has come down to us without the names attached. How large a corpus of work this comprises we cannot accurately gauge. See Dunbar, pp. 178-81, and esp. notes, pp. 352-56.
 4. Henryson (The Testament of Cresseid, line 41), Dunbar (The Goldyn Targe, 253-70), Gavin Douglas (The Palice of Honour, 919-21), and David Lindsay (The Testament of Papyngo, 12) all praise Chaucer, and only Henryson does not single out Gower and Lydgate as well. See Henryson, p. 112; Dunbar, p. 37; The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt, STS 4th Ser. 3, (Edinburgh & London: 1967), p. 62; and Lindsay, I, 56.
 5. Gavin Douglas, in translating Virgil's Aeneid into the vulgar tongue, makes a clear differentiation between using "the language of Scottis natioun" and borrowings from English ("kepand na sudron bot our awyn langage, / And speikis as I lernyt quhen I was page. / Nor 3it sa cleyn all sudron I refuss, / Bot sum word I pronounce as nyghtbouris dois.") See Virgil's Aeneid Translated into Scottish by Gavin Douglas, ed. David F.C. Coldwell, 4 vols., STS 3rd Ser. 26, 27, 28, 30, (Edinburgh & London: 1957-64), II, Bk.I.Pro. 103-114.

royal court would continue to serve as the country's artistic centre. His efforts to encourage Scottish letters were not inconsiderable. He wrote poetry himself, founded the "Castalian Band" school of poets, and even composed a critical treatise entitled Ane Schort Treatise Containing some Reulis and Cautelis to be obseruit and eschewit in Scottish Poesie (1585). After the Union of the Crowns in 1603, however, James removed his court from Edinburgh to London, and at the same time he dropped Scots spelling practices and even vocabulary from personal use--going to the lengths of rewriting his earlier works in Scots--in favour of London English, the English of the King James Bible. It was a blow from which Scottish letters never fully recovered.⁶

"Middle Scots," then, is a linguistic term, cutting across conventional historical divisions, covering the development of Scottish language and literature from the middle of the fifteenth century to the late sixteenth century. This period is one marked with radical social upheavals and changes. Of chief importance, of course, is the appearance of Protestantism in the British Isles during the sixteenth century. But although the histories of Scotland and England are inter-related they are very different. England suffered brutal civil war and the bloody establishment of the Tudor kingship, experienced a rebirth of humanistic interests, and broke from the Roman Catholic Church to suit the needs of Henry VIII, a political move designed to avoid renewed civil strife. Scotland during the same period saw the unbroken if troubled reigns of a succession of Stewart kings, remaining, despite growing humanistic influences,⁷ essentially medieval in charac-

6. See Janet M. Templeton, "Scots: An Outline History," in A.J. Aitken, ed. Lowland Scots, (Edinburgh: 1973), 4-19.

7. See John MacQueen, "The Literature of Fifteenth Century Scotland," in Jennifer M. Brown, ed. Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century, (London: 1977), 194.

ter. James IV, Henry VIII's brother-in-law, typifies the difference: as Scotland's last pre-Machiavellian king, he uselessly honoured the "Auld Alliance" with France, and died at Flodden in 1513 quixotically attempting to embody chivalric ideals. This was also the period in which Scotland enjoyed its greatest influence as an independent European power.

The Reformation, Scotland's religious and political break with Roman Catholicism, established itself almost thirty years later than in England but proved ultimately a much more radical change. Briefly, Anglicanism forcibly dissolved the monastic communities, and their properties were claimed by the Crown; the liturgy was altered; and spiritual loyalties were re-aligned from the Pope in Rome to the English king (a switch of allegiances which was carried on with compromises through Elizabeth I's reign, her media via). The ascendancy of the Scottish ultra-protestants, after an explosive start in 1560, was more gradual but deeper rooted. Some vandalism of churches occurred--notably at Perth, Dundee, Stirling, Linlithgow, and Edinburgh--but damage was not as thorough nor government-sanctioned as in England. On the whole, the functions and upkeep of the friaries and monasteries were permitted to lapse peaceably, allowing for transitional displacement rather than overnight usurpation of church loyalties; and the Crown did not claim ecclesiastical properties until 1625-27.⁸ The more austere and morally disciplined Calvinists eventually adopted a modified Melvillian separation of Church and State, created a new liturgy, established universal education, and gradually supplanted an episcopal system in favour of a

8. Gordon Donaldson, Scotland: James V - James VII, (Edinburgh: 1971), 93-94, 134-35, and 296-97.

more democratic--that is, middle class--presbyterianism.⁹ The cultural shift from Catholicism to Calvinism finally proved to be further-reaching in terms of national character than England's split with Rome, but its full effects took longer to achieve. The characters of Elizabethan England (by then a world power) and Reformation Scotland (ingrown and insular)--considerably altered from their medieval Catholic avatars--were markedly different from each other despite the general appearance of a united Protestant front against the Catholic nations of Europe.

The "Middle Scots" period embraces all these complex and fluid areas, the entrenchment of the burgess class as a governmental power, the growing influence of humanistic thought, the Middle Stewart Age (James III - James V minority), and the Late Stewart Age (James V minority - James VI). The arbitrary selection by historians of the year 1500 to mark off roughly the Renaissance from the medieval period is even less applicable to Scotland than it is to England. Scotland's medieval societal structures did not appreciably change until the Reformation, well into the sixteenth century. Even then, though some fundamental intellectual patterns altered, basic social relationships and non-religious concepts were slow in changing. The "medieval" world

9. Donaldson, *ibid.*, 141, 149-52. Professor Donaldson notes that "in many of its aspects the Reformation did no more than continue trends already discernible in the late medieval system. Even the rejection of the papacy was no more than a logical sequel to the steady growth of royal control over the church before 1560; and, more generally, a critical attitude to external authority, the weakening of the international ideal and the strengthening of national and local feeling had been reflected already in greater interest taken in collegiate and burgh churches, locally controlled, than in religious orders with their headquarters overseas" (p. 141). Further, "when, in 1573, it at last became impossible to retain a benefice without acknowledging the reformed faith, a mere handful of clergy were deprived, whereas in 1662, when a presbyterian system was superseded by an episcopal system, nearly 300 ministers were deprived..." (p. 152).

view survived into the seventeenth century and the replacement of the Ptolemaic model of the universe with the Copernican model. The forms of worship of God had changed. But until then the earth was still the centre--and the dregs--of the universe, and hierarchically arranged with man (under God) as its lord; scientia was still theoretical and not "practical"; and certain feudal social structures among other cultural features carried on in that social organization and economic relationships remained the same as they had been for generations.¹⁰ This slow alteration in life-style and ideas is especially true in agrarian society.

Nevertheless, I take the Reformation in Scotland as a convenient break from the medieval period, as it does represent the implementation of a radical alteration in thought. Only once do I consciously overstep this Reformation Age "barrier" by discussing Robert Sempill's The Legend of the Bischope of St. Androis Lyfe (1584). Since there is little in subject matter or form to distinguish other poems as belonging to one age or the other I assume the other poems to be essentially "medieval," although some of them, for example The Iusting and Debait Vp at the Drum by Alexander Scott (d. 1574) or The Wyf of Auchtermwchty, were undoubtedly written well into the sixteenth century.

I intend therefore to examine poems dating roughly from the mid-1400's to the mid-1500's. I use "Middle Scots" as a term of convenience: it is less unwieldy than "Scottish vernacular literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" and greatly less objectionable than the label "Scottish Chaucerians." As noted above, the four major Middle Scots poets are known to have read and admired Chaucer; although it seems they admired him not so much for his masterpiece The Canter-

10. Donaldson, *ibid.*, 256-75.

bury Tales as for his "serious" translations and allegories--still fashionable in the hundred years or so after Chaucer's death--such as his House of Fame, Troilus and Criseyde, and Parliament of Fowls. But though they pay homage to his inspiration and feel grounded in the "Inglist" tradition themselves, they directly imitated Chaucer very little, and his influence lessened appreciably with the passage of time. Henryson makes extensive use of rime royal (the stanza pattern of Troilus and Criseyde and James I's Kingis Quhair that became a commonplace); he draws on The Nun's Priest's Tale for one of his Morall Fabillis; and he continues the tragic Cresseid-story, but in his very different way. Dunbar may have had in mind Chaucer's portrait of the Wife of Bath in composing The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo; and Douglas, while admiring him and imitating the House of Fame with his own Palice of Honour, actually apologises on behalf of Chaucer (Eneados, Bk.I.Pro.405-414), whom he considers too free a translator.¹¹ Chaucer's influence was important but nevertheless limited. He is admired for his style and honoured for his primacy in English letters, but his work rarely serves as a model for Scottish imitators; and, aside from the four major poets, Chaucer publically receives little other contemporary attention in Scotland. He is one among several influences. The Middle Scots authors were inspired as much by their own oral and folk literature traditions; by Continental influences (romances, fables, fabliaux, songs, the French Grand Rhétoriqueurs, Italian classicists); by northern English traditions (e.g. alliterative

11. Regarding the actual extent of Chaucerian influence on Scottish makars see Denton Fox, "The Scottish Chaucerians," in D.S. Brewer, ed. Chaucer and Chaucerians, (London: 1966), 164-200; and Priscilla Bawcutt, "Gavin Douglas and Chaucer," Review of English Studies, 21 (1970), 401-421.

romances); and by their own late-blooming native written tradition as by southern, specifically Chaucerian, English models. During the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries Scotland enjoyed a strong blossoming of literature that was not paralleled in England, producing poetry comparable to the best literature written on the Continent (for example, the works of Villon, Rabelais, and Ariosto). The chief light of fifteenth century English letters was the copious and pedestrian John Lydgate; and one might also add unknown geniuses like "the Wakefield Master" or "the Tanner Playwright" writing parts of the Corpus Christi dramas. In the early sixteenth century the reigning poet is John Skelton, the renowned doggerelist and satirist. In what has been described as the "desert" of fifteenth century English letters, it has come to be recognized that the few bright stars shining above that desert were Scottish.¹² "Scottish Chaucerians" does not suggest a brilliant and independent literary tradition north of the Tweed but a Chaucer-dominated English province. It is a misnomer which is happily being superseded, melting in the strong light of recent scholarship and criticism.

All of the poems I intend to examine in this study, including the work of Henryson and Dunbar, we owe either to the chance survival of early printed books or more frequently to the invaluable work of the sixteenth century Scottish anthologists John Asloan, George Bannatyne, and Sir Richard Maitland. Each compiled substantial manuscript collections of contemporary (fifteenth and sixteenth century) verse; and since the great bulk of their collections are devoted to Scottish poetry, we may assume their chief interest was in Scotland's develop-

12. Fox, op. cit., 166. See also C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama, (Oxford: 1954), 1.

ing national literature. The works of Henryson and Dunbar have recently been re-edited, but for the most part the other poems must be sought in Scottish Text Society editions of the Asloan, Bannatyne, and Maitland Folio manuscripts, and collections of early printed works.

The Asloan Manuscript was compiled early in the reign of James V, about the year 1515.¹³ It was a substantial collection of contemporary, largely fifteenth century, prose and verse; but the manuscript was badly mutilated, so that of the sixty-one items listed in its table of contents lamentably only twenty-six pieces survive, sixteen poems (including tale collections) among them. The loss of over half its contents is indeed greatly to be regretted, and it is small consolation that at least a terminus ad quem of 1515 can be assigned to the items listed on its contents page. When complete, Asloan's book was chiefly "secular" in bias, a comprehensive collection including moral treatises by John of Ireland and others, "a Boke of Chess," chronicles of Scottish history (embracing anti-English polemics), social and scientific tracts by Sir Gilbert Hay, romances, allegories, beast fables, tale collections, at least eight poems by Dunbar, the major works of Henryson, and diverse anonymous "ballats." Asloan seems to have made a strong use of early printed books as well as other manuscript sources in putting together his anthology. Twenty literary items have survived from the press of Chepman and Myllar, Scotland's first printers; of these, seven titles are found duplicated in Asloan's manuscript.¹⁴ It

13. The date is posited by Gregory Smith, op. cit., 14.

14. Pieces from the Makculloch and the Gray MSS. Together with the Chepman and Myllar Prints, ed. George Stevenson, STS 1st Ser. 65, (Edinburgh & London: 1918), xii. Only three pieces in Asloan that coincide with the prints that survive, but the others can be found in the table of contents. They are The Porteous of Nobleness, The Regiment of Kings, The Flytting Between Dunbar and Kennedy, Orpheus and Eurydice, The Goldyn Targe, "The Maying and Disport of Chaucer," and Gologrus and Gawane. Even if it cannot be proved that Asloan

seems probable such works as Henryson's Testament of Cresseid and Morall Fabillis, Rauf Coilyear, and The Thre Prestis of Peblis--to name just those poems found in print later in the sixteenth century--were also available in early printed editions now lost. That Asloan should copy from printed books is of course not surprising. Printed books, while able to reach and influence a wider audience than scription-produced volumes, were cheaply made, inelegant, and relatively perishable; they did not replace handwritten books for almost a century. Copying by hand to make one's own book--from both selected handwritten and the newly printed sources--was still widely practiced. It is significant, however, to note the essential Scottishness of Asloan's early work: all of the important poetic titles in the collection are by known or anonymous Scottish poets (it is difficult to assess the national origin of the many anonymous "ballats"). Even of the ten prose pieces six are decidedly Scots; two are Scottish translations from Latin originals; one work, paralleling the six days of creation with the six ages of the world, indicates neither author, date, nor place of origin and so cannot be judged; and only one piece is conclusively from "Ingliss," part of John of Trevisa's translation of Higden's

used these Chepman and Myllar prints, at least these were available to him. Denton Fox, "Manuscripts and Prints of Scots Poetry in the Sixteenth Century," in Bards and Makars, ed. A.J. Aitken, Matthew P. MacDiarmid, and D.S. Thomson, (Glasgow: 1977), 157-58, suggests that where Asloan and the prints can be compared "the similarity between the text in the print and in the Asloan MS. is very marked, and extends even to details of abbreviation." But though they are close they are different enough (Asloan often contains better readings) that Professor Fox thinks "Asloan was copying from prints closely related to, but not identical with, the surviving Chepman and Myllar prints," possibly different states of the same edition, possibly "improving" readings as he copied.

Polichronicon.¹⁵ Asloan's selective, Scottish consciousness is surely no accident but a celebration of national pride.

Similarly, George Bannatyne's mammoth enterprise reflects this same concern to preserve many national treasures, although Bannatyne also includes a few selections from Lydgate, "Chauseir" (frequently apocryphal), John Heywood's Epigrams (1562), and pieces by other unnamed "Inglismen."¹⁶ Bannatyne states in his prefatory poem that he rescued from oblivion some poems in "copies awld mankit and mvtillait,"¹⁷ but in fact--and in terms of Scottish letters--he does not seem to have reached back more than one hundred years: The Colkelbie Sow, Holland's Howlat, the works of Henryson, "Clerk," Patrick Johnson, Rowll, possibly Kennedy and Dunbar as well, date from the mid- to late-fifteenth century. While not questioning Bannatyne's word, nothing earlier than Henryson and his contemporaries can be reliably dated (I take the ascription of Christis Kirk of the Grene to James I to be extremely suspect). Many of the works are post-1500; and he includes the early work of poets of the Reformation period such as Robert Sempill and Alexander Montgomerie, the ink of whose poems would have been scarcely dried in the 1560's. The bulk of his collection is made up of lyrics and shorter poems, some long narrative works, one play and fragments from two more. Bannatyne does not seem to have been interested in knightly epics like The Bruce or The Wallace, romances, books of courtesy, and non-fiction pieces expounding on such pursuits as chess, his-

15. Trevisa's translation was printed by Caxton in 1482 and by Wynkyn de Word in 1495: see Ranaulf Higden's entry in The Concise Dictionary of National Biography, 2 vols., (Oxford: 1969), I, 618.

16. Bannatyne, IV, 332, concludes with a notation of the date. Ritchie, I, xxxiv, suggests Bannatyne was at work on it as early as his student days in St. Andrews; this is confirmed by William Ramson, "On Bannatyne's Editing," Bards and Makars, op. cit., 175.

17. Bannatyne, II, 1, line 7.

tory, governance, and like chivalric interests, so prominent in Asloan's anthology. He systematically excludes works concerning things gentlemanly. Bannatyne is firmly rooted, from a sixteenth century point of view, in the modern and the middle class. Like Asloan before him, it seems acceptable to assume that Bannatyne compiled his collection from a substantial number of printed books now lost, as well as manuscript sources, the work of Dunbar, Douglas, Lindsay, probably Henryson, Lydgate, Heywood, Chaucer,¹⁸ and the tale of The Freiris of Berwik to name a few likely examples.

Bannatyne arranged his book very carefully, according to the following plan:

Now 3e haif heir this ilk buik sa provydit
 That in fyve pairtis It is dewly devydit
 The first concernis godis gloir and our saluatioun
 Nixt ar morale / grave And als besyd it
 grund on gud consale . The thrid I will nocht hyd it
 Ar blyith and glaid Maid for our consollatioun .
 The ferd of lue / and thair richt reformatioun .
 The fyift ar tailis and storeis weill discydit
 Reid as 3e pleiss / I neid no moir narratioun .¹⁹

He seems to have made a loosely hierarchical compilation, beginning

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18. Fox, "Manuscripts and Prints of Scots Poetry," op. cit., 158-59, argues cogently for Bannatyne's use of the undated (1545) Thynne edition of Chaucer as copy-text for supposed poems by Chaucer. Accepting his argument, it still leaves unexplained Bannatyne's reasons for choosing only the few minor poems he does when he has Chaucer's entire masterful corpus before him. After a minute study of the Bannatyne MS. and his sources where known, Fox hypothesizes that Bannatyne "might normally be expected to make between fifteen and thirty errors per hundred lines". But it should be emphasized that this is a working hypothesis, and a frail one, not a fact" (p. 160). "Error" is perhaps too strong a term, for all departures from the text are not mistakes but may represent improvements, misunderstanding an English word, Protestant alterations, and the like. An average of 22 small changes per hundred lines, while not superior, is not outrageous in an age rarely even concerned with authorship, let alone textual fidelity, especially as compared with a freewheeling copyist such as John Shirley.
19. Bannatyne, II, 1, lines 10-18. It seems highly probable from the evidence that Bannatyne intended to publish his collection. He has, fortunately, a notion of authorial canon.

with items of highest thematic importance (praise of God, salvation) and ending with those possibly of least moral justification (recreational tales and stories). The selection, then, is not chronological, authorial, or literary (ordering poems by generic type--lyrics, narratives, allegories) but moral. He groups poems according to theme, spiritual value, and intellectual utility. This plan is not rigidly consistent, for obviously the third and fourth categories, "ballattis mirry" (often satirical) and the four-section "ballattis of luve" (songs of love, condemning evil women, condemning faithless men, and dispraising earthly love altogether), seem to be considerably more frivolous from a moral viewpoint than poems contained in the fifth category. It may be that Bannatyne decided, on a symphonic scale, to take the advice Henryson suggests in his prologue to the Morall Fabillis, "With sad materis sum merines to ming / Accordis weill" (26-27), juxtaposing ribald songs with moral philosophy. However one finally views Bannatyne's particular arrangement,²⁰ much of the material under present consideration derives from Bannatyne's third and fifth sections.

Regarding the matter of the third section, "Ballattis mirry and vthir solatius consaittis" (II, 258), Bannatyne left us no word describing his choice of poems or their moral justification. He only makes

20. Ramson, op. cit., 175-80, argues that Bannatyne's five divisions "establishes a sequence which makes a coherent and extended statement on the relationship between God and man ('Ballattis of Theologie'), the relationship between man and his fellows ('Ballattis full of Wisdome and Morallitie'), the nature of the consolation accessible to man ('Ballattis Mirry and Vthir Solatius Consaittis'), the relation between earthly and divine love ('Ballattis of Luve'), and the nature of human wisdom ('Fabillis Wyiss and Sapient')." I have difficulty accepting the claims for individual sections, especially the notion that the third section "expounds (the word is not too strong) a theory of comedy," and the selections and particular arrangement in the fifth section. But at heart Dr. Ramson's argument is that the arrangement is essentially a moral one.

so bold in his prefatory poem, cited above, as not to apologise for their inclusion: the solace they offer is justification enough. Poetry valued solely as entertainment is a point to which we shall return.

Bannatyne, in regard to the tales of the fifth section, includes a Henrysonian note to the reader justifying their inclusion:

My freindis thir storeis subsequent
 Albeid bot fabillis they present
 3it devyne doctowris of Iugement
 Sayis thair ar but dowl
 Grave materis wyiss and sapient
 Vndir the workis of poyetis gent
 Thairfoir be war that thow consent
 To blame thir heir setowt.²¹

The fifth section, "talis and storeis," consists of allegories, beast fables, and beast-allegories (The Colkelbie Sow, Holland's Howlat). There are only two tales, The Freiris of Berwik and Henryson's Robene and Makyne, which, although potentially instructive, will not necessarily yield exegetical riches. The worried tone of "bot fabillis" and firm admonition to "be war...to blame thir heir setowt" returns again to the conventional apology for entertaining stories. It is a commonplace that great wisdom and moral efficacy may be extracted from seemingly simple tales, and therefore such tales provide the best that literature offers, entertainment (solatium) and instruction (sapientia). One need not regard Bannatyne's traditional caveat seriously, but simply as a fulfilment of conventional expectations. The Bannatyne collection finishes as it began, on a strongly sapient and therefore morally valuable note.

The Maitland Folio manuscript, begun possibly in the 1570's and terminated by Sir Richard Maitland's death in 1586, is a later and less

21. Bannatyne, IV, 116-17.

comprehensive collection than Bannatyne's. But it is again predominantly Scottish (with fewer English intrusions), "secular," and extremely valuable. It likewise leans towards lyrics and allegories, and away from religious poems (politically unsafe) and chivalrous tales (unfashionable). If, like Bannatyne, Maitland's arrangement of his material was governed by a specific plan that plan is not immediately apparent now, for moral admonitions, drinking songs, advice to the king, and ribald tales stand side by side.²² Compared to Bannatyne, Maitland seems to have been a somewhat more conscientious Protestant editor (though Bannatyne also makes religious alterations) and a somewhat less scrupulous copyist. The manuscript is also a collection of late-fifteenth century but chiefly sixteenth century verse, and probably also makes use of both printed and manuscript sources.²³ The Maitland Folio is one gauge of late sixteenth century Scottish literary taste; but, more to the immediate point, it provides a valuable "second copy" of some poems found in the earlier manuscript collections (for example, The Freiris of Berwik) as well as a few unique texts of Middle Scots humorous narrative poetry, such as The Dumb Wife or Clapperton's "Wa Worth Maryage."

For centuries poetry rather than prose was considered the proper vehicle for literature. Medieval literature is generally divided into

22. Ramson, op. cit., 176, notes that "in the Maitland Folio, where there is evidence of grouping, it is by author." There does not, however, seem to be much evidence of grouping, a situation not helped by the fact that the manuscript's individual leaves had come loose and were reassembled by later editors.

23. Two authors are featured most prominently: first, William Dunbar (71 poems); and, second, Richard Maitland himself (41 poems). The rest of the collection is made up of a sprinkling of authors supplying one to five poems each.

two classes, religious and secular. Religious verse is pertinent to this discussion only insofar as it provides the basis of a secular parody or the background to understand secular humour. Medieval religious verse from nation to nation exhibits a curiously uniform quality. That is, with its many conventions, set themes, and traditional subject matter, it is often difficult to determine whether a particular lyric originated in Scotland, England, or was a translation of a Continental poem.

Secular literature, by contrast, is the likeliest place one will find a "national character" expressed, even in shared folktales. Here one can learn about the concerns and interests of ordinary life, the mental and cultural sets of a particular age and country. This second class of literature may be divided into two species, serious secular poetry and humorous secular poetry. Serious secular poetry would include romances, allegories, courtesy manuals, histories, chanson d'amour, laments, encomia, wisdom literature and moral philosophy in tales and songs, and subspecies of these categories. Humorous secular poetry would include comic and parodic versions of all the aforementioned categories, fabliaux, fables, "solatius" tales, parodies, satires, flytings, squibs and lampoons, and lewd and "mirry" songs, of which a surprisingly high percentage survives in Middle Scots as compared to early modern English.²⁴ This may be due partly to the relatively late flowering of Middle Scots literature (c. 1490-1520), with changes of taste allowing more "popular" literature to proliferate (and, more importantly, survive); and partly to the effects of the Reformation, in the name of which some church libraries were burnt wholesale. During

24. The ratio of extant religious verse to secular verse in medieval English literature is roughly two to one: see Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, The Index of Middle English Verse, (New York: 1943).

this period it became safer not to write religious verse at all lest the poet became suspected of papistry.

All of the works to be studied are "popular," written by men of literate professional classes broadly to entertain and usually to instruct a general audience, an audience that could include the court, the nobles and landed gentry, the professional and merchant classes, with perhaps only the lowest classes being regularly excluded from the written literary tradition, though even this must remain tentative.²⁵ The gulf separating the upper and lower classes in Scotland was never as great as that in European countries or even as that in England. The royal court, until its removal to London in 1603, remained the largest patron and dominant influence in literature. But if we may judge from what has survived, fashion and the emphasis of interest shifted away from chivalry and courtly-love themes toward allegory, pageantry, and poems of moral wisdom, with possibly a greater appetite for burlesque and satire: mock-tournaments, peasant-brawls, anti-feminism, and abuse in society because of corruption in government and the clergy are all part of a continuing tradition. Yet, as has been frequently noted before, the rise of the middle classes and the advent of the printing press greatly enlarged the reading public and with it increased the influence of a more popular taste in literature, so that court and marketplace affected each other more directly, the middle class interests eventually coming to dominate.

For the most part, the works are also "popular" in the sense that they are conventional (this includes playing upon conventional ideas

25. MacQueen, *op. cit.*, 193-99, has shown that the Scottish kings, aristocracy, and the burgesses--merchants, craftsmen, and professional men--all contributed to literary patronage in Scotland to a greater or lesser extent.

and forms), accepting of society's ideas, ideals, and attitudes, and and written in a "democratic" voice, that is, by men in a largely homogeneous society who are not especially conscious of themselves as extraordinary human beings.²⁶ The age was one of flux, suffering political, economic, and intellectual--chiefly religious--upheavals. But, in general, poetry was firmly placed in society. Poets' opinions were integrated with society's beliefs, and poets themselves, in addition to being wholly non-introspective, did not look in or down on society from the outside (largely a post-Romantic phenomenon). Society as a whole was united in its view of the universe: God-governed, royalist, nationalist, hierarchical, for the most part culturally and ideologically stable. The fight over the forms of worship, Catholicism versus Protestantism, was bloody and bitter. But atheism was not a viable alternative, nor was a democratic republic a real alternative to royal government; and the list could be extended. Even Dunbar, a man conscious of his profession as a poet, knew his place. He was a court-paid word-artisan; and though his annual pension equalled the income from a moderate benefice without a bishop's expenses, he craved a "real" profession in the Church. He did not set himself up above or against society but spoke in tune with it, or, as a satirist, in defence of it. Among poets, originality of imagination was not particularly valued (although most made an effort to invest something new in established forms), whereas craftsman-like skill and "eloquence" of

26. I am indebted here to W.H. Auden's attempt to set out principles of "light" verse: see The English Auden, ed. Edward Mendelson, (London: 1977), 363-68. This is not to deny that some men were aware of their status as makers, as artists.

expression were valued.²⁷ A poet's philosophy, his themes, even his forms and techniques of craft were largely received, handed down and sanctified by tradition. Poetry was basically a conservative art, reflective rather than inventive: that is, poetry followed and mirrored society, and did not lead or direct it. Poetry altered of course with fashions and popular ideas; but, like society, fundamentally it proved slow to embrace radical changes.

ii. Narrative: Stories, Mimetic Transcripts

In Middle Scots there are several words used to denote narratives in verse or prose: cronikle, fable, gest, narratioun, storye, taill.²⁸ In usage, the primary distinction--apart from specifying particular kinds of narrative (e.g. Wyntoun's Original Chronicle; or "gest" meaning geste de roman)--is the distinction between factual and fictitious stories. In general, chronicles, gests, and narrations describe factual accounts and histories, even legendary and mythic histories; fable, story, and tale are applied to fictions. This fact-fiction dichotomy, however, is by no means rigid, and frequently a qualifier such as "trew narratioun" or "geist but fable" is appended to clarify the matter. Further, the words fable, story, and tale seem to be used more or less

27. Priscilla Bawcutt, "The 'Library' of Gavin Douglas," in Bards and Makars, op. cit., 120, notes of Douglas that "like Dunbar, he praises Chaucer not for his humour nor his genius as a story-teller but for his style and diction ('eloquence'); the poems of Chaucer that he most often echoes or alludes to are the courtly and chivalric ones." Sir David Lindsay is likewise concerned with eloquence, complaining in the prologue to his Testament of the Papyngo that "in all the garth of Eloquence / Is no thyng left bot barrane stok and stone: / The Poleit termes ar pullit, euerilk one, / Be thir forenamit Poetis of prudence" (Lindsay, I, 58, lines 57-60).

28. See the DOST. All of these words have a variety of meanings which are impractical to cite in full. I have taken the liberty of including storye and taill, although the volumes containing S and T have not yet been compiled.

interchangably. For example, the Peblis-poet uses "taill" to describe a substantial narrative, "the second taill tald be M. Archebald" (actually two anecdotes and a separate story woven together).²⁹ Yet another poet is free to use "taill" to describe the one-sentence observations of impossibilia encountered in his poem, noting that "Quhen all thir tailis are trew in deid / All wemen will be trew" ("I Yeid the Gate Wes Nevir Gane," 47-48).³⁰ Henryson could readily equate geste with story, in Makyne's phrase "Robene, thow hes hard sounge and say / In gestis and storeis auld..." (Robene and Makyne, 89-90),³¹ the words distinguishing only form of presentation (with music or without) rather than truth of content (fact or fiction). The terms tale and story could be and were used to denote a variety of poetic effusions or parts thereof; the terms were imprecise, applicable to narratives of all kinds, to lyrics, and to other forms among which we may make formal and generic divisions.

What then generally qualified in the medieval period as a "taill" might not in truth qualify as such under a more exacting scrutiny of narrative art; and the present investigation will require a more precise definition of narrative. Central to the argument of this thesis are distinctions made among narrative poems between tales and mimetic transcripts; that is, between stories proper and poems which seem to tell a story but, for reasons made clear below, cannot be said to do so. In considering humorous narrative verse I mean basically we are treating narratives of the non-dramatic kind; we are dealing with imi-

29. The Thre Prestis of Peblis, ed. T.D. Robb, STS New Ser. 8, (Edinburgh & London: 1920), 28.

30. In Bannatyne, III, 67; my italics.

31. *Ibid.*, IV, 308-312.

tative comic actions that are read or recited rather than acted out. But narratives of all kinds have a "dramatic" quality, for, however presented, narratives hold certain inherent structural features in common with dramas. Therefore I have felt free to draw on a long-established dramatic model in describing stories and mimetic transcripts, patterning the discussion on Aristotle's Poetics.³² In the following observations on and definitions of narrative I mention but otherwise exclude genre and tone from consideration of kind and structure. Further, while concentrating in large measure on medieval works, I cite titles from different literary periods, assuming that the argument will be applicable not only to Middle Scots verse narratives but to narratives in literature generally.

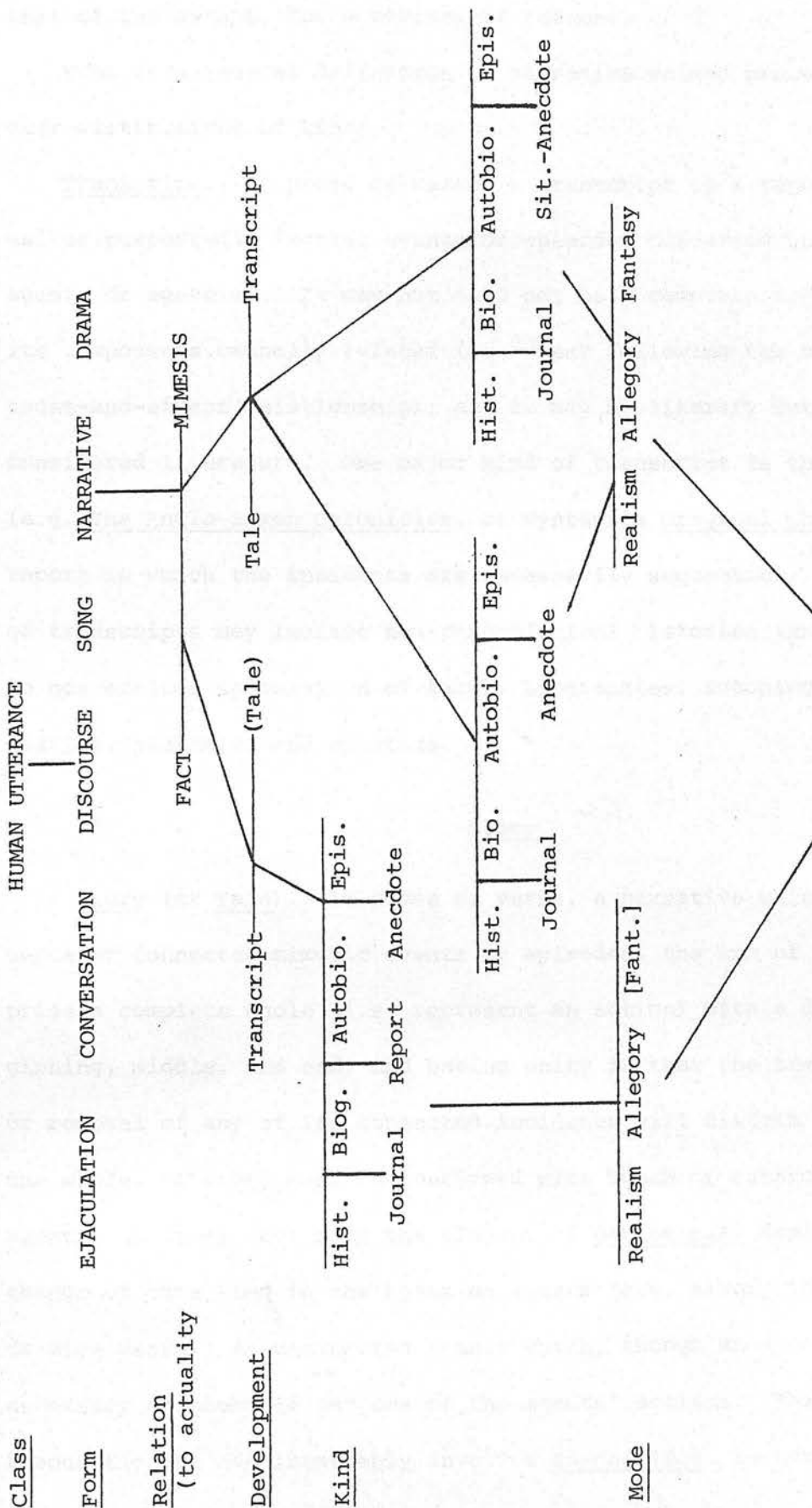
Narrative

To begin, we must establish a general definition of narrative and its constituents. Narrative is one of the many forms of human utterance. In ascending order of complexity, the forms of human utterance include ejaculation, conversation, discourse, song, narrative, and drama. A narrative may accommodate any or all four of the preceding forms within its structure. In relation to actuality, a narrative may be either factual or mimetic; and both fact and fiction may be included within a single narrative. But the ratio of fact to fiction

32. Aristotle, On the Art of Poetry, trans. Ingram Bywater, (Oxford: 1920; rpt. 1976). In comparing poetry and drama I follow Aristotle's authority: "As for the poetry which merely narrates, or imitates by means of versified language (without action), it is evident that it has several points in common with Tragedy. The construction of its stories should be clearly like that in a drama; they should be based on a single action, one that is a complete whole in itself, with a beginning, middle, and end, so as to enable the work to produce its own proper pleasure with all the organic unity of a living creature" (p. 79); and further, epic poetry must have all the features of Tragedy save Song and Spectacle (p. 81).

is not the usual basis for distinguishing narrative intent in relation to reality. That is, a factual transcript can include a fictional story or stories and yet remain factual overall; a fictional tale may include one or several factual transcripts but cannot therefore be considered factual overall and must remain fiction. Common kinds of narrative include history, biography, autobiography, confession, epistle, journal, report (account of experience), anecdote, and certain types of speculation. In terms of structural development, a fictitious narrative can be distinguished as either a tale or a mimetic transcript. A tale may also be considered a mimetic transcript; but a mimetic transcript, even if it includes a story or stories within its framework, necessarily cannot be termed a story (see below). The mode of a narrative may be realism, allegory, or fantasy; or these modes may be combined variously in a single narrative. (For convenience, I have set out the above discussion in chart form: see Fig. 1.)

There are many species of narrative, genres or combinations of genres. Genres are usually distinguished from one another according to subject matter and established conventions: in fiction, for example, the fairy tale, travel book, pastoral, romance, saint's legend, parody, Western, adventure story, satire, love story, crime story, and so forth. Whether or not a narrative excites an emotional response, and what kind of emotional response (e.g. tragic or comic), is often determined by a narrative's mood or combinations of mood which produce an overall tone. Tone, however, is experienced, judged more by subjective than objective factors. This is not to deny the possibility that a narrative may excite a common response in many people in different countries and over long periods of time. But the achievement of a particular tone is dependent on the reaction of the witness to



N.B. Interplay between fact and fiction, and combinations of all levels, kinds, and modes are possible. Whether factual or mimetic, briefer forms are often "situational" in nature.

Figure 1

the narrative. The reader's perception may not be in harmony with that of the author, for a variety of reasons.

From this general definition of narrative we may proceed to further distinctions of kind:

Transcript. In prose or verse, a transcript is a report of factual or purportedly factual events or episodes concerned with human agents or agencies. It may but need not be a complete account, nor its components causally related (one event following the next in a cause-and-effect relationship); and it may be literary but need not be considered literature. One major kind of transcript is the chronicle (e.g. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, or Wyntoun's Original Chronicle), a report in which the incidents are necessarily sequential. Other kinds of transcripts may include non-chronological histories (and histories do not exclude speculation of fact), biographies, autobiographies, diaries, journals, and epistles.

Story

Story (or Tale). In prose or verse, a narrative which is a sequence of connected mimetic events or episodes, the sum of which comprise a complete whole (i.e. represent an action) with a definite beginning, middle, and end, and having unity in that the transposition or removal of any of its connected incidents will disjoin and dislocate the whole. A story must be concerned with human or anthropomorphic agents. A story must have the element of peripeteia, depicting a change of some kind in the agent or agents (e.g. misery to happiness, or vice versa), an unexpected change which, though unexpected, is a necessary or probable outcome of the agents' actions. This peripeteia frequently but not invariably involves anagnorisis, recognition in the

agents of this change and their own part in effecting it. Most often recognition is movement from illusion or opinion (pistis) to fact or reality (gnosis), a shift from ignorance to knowledge. A story must also have a sense of being addressed directly to a real or imagined audience, as opposed to lyric forms, which do not necessarily presuppose an audience.³³ These qualities are equally applicable to tragic or to comic tales. A story may be brief, a complete single episode, such as an anecdote; or developed, a story of several or many episodes. Stories may be simple, a single unified tale usually but not necessarily unfolding sequentially (events may be removed from sequence, such as in a flashback); or interwoven, two or more tales joined together to form a whole. Like chronicles, for example history or autobiography, stories may be told from the point of view of the first or third person, or in combination. The best stories are generally considered to be developed or interwoven. Stories have at least three basic analytic components: linguistic craft (techne); plot-line (muthos); and, usually, theme (dianoia).

There are several varieties or kinds of stories, which include the following:

Mimetic autobiography. A first-person life story or partial life story, narrated supposedly by a fictional character. E.g. Dickens' David Copperfield, or Dostoevski's Notes from the Underground.

Mimetic biography. Simple biographies or partial biographies of fictional characters, such as Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn or Joseph Fielding's Tom Jones. Included also are narratives in which the fic-

33. This distinction is not so important for any period except relatively modern times. In the medieval world, for example, all literature whether dramatic, narrative, or lyric was assumed to have a social function, automatically positing a direct address to some audience.

tional first-person narrator tells the story or stories of other fictional characters: e.g. Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights, or F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby.

Mimetic letters or diaries. First-person narratives told primarily through fictional diaries or letters: e.g. Sartre's Nausea, or C.S. Lewis' The Screwtape Letters.

Allegorical stories. A polysemous story, such as a parable, often but not necessarily animating personified concepts or otherwise abstract agents: e.g. Henryson's Orpheus and Eurydice, Spenser's The Faerie Queene.

Fantasy tales. A story in which the sequential events are impossible or highly improbable in reality and so neither necessary nor probable outcomes of antecedent episodes; yet, though improbable in the natural world, stories following an internal logic of their own. Included are pure fantasies, such as "King Berdok," Byron's Vision of Judgement, Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, or Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five; most fairy tales; and most "science fiction" narratives, such as H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds or Ray Bradbury's The Martian Chronicles.

These categories do not exhaust the possibilities. Various combinations of these kinds of stories are also possible: for example, romance convention and fairy tale fantasy, such as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; or fantastic allegory, as in Aesop's Fables.

Mimetic Transcript

Mimetic transcript. A transcript which is not factual but fictitious. A mimetic transcript may have many or all save one of the essential qualities of a proper story, that one element being the lack of a distinct peripeteia. Without peripeteia, the "story" must be

considered a mimetic transcript. A mimetic transcript may have many of the recognizable appurtenances of narrative, such as fictional characters or real characters in fictional situations, dialogue, a sequence of connected mimetic incidents, or even contain a proper tale or tales within the whole work, yet not of itself comprise a story as previously defined. Examples would include Plato's Republic, eclogues like Spenser's The Shepherd's Calendar, Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy, The Owl and the Nightingale, Dives et Pauper, Mandeville's Travels, Dunbar's The Goldyn Targe, More's Utopia, Bacon's New Atlantis, Pope's Dunciad, Swift's Gulliver's Travels, Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, Burns' The Jolly Beggars, Blake's The French Revolution, Katherine Mansfield's "The Fly," among many others. This should give some idea of the range and variety. Mimetic transcripts often lack unity as well as peripeteia, in that episodes do not comprise the chronicle of an agent or agents but that of a distinct group; or, in that episodes may be transposed or deleted without seriously disrupting the whole: for example, peasant-brawl poems, such as Peblis to the Play, follow the fortunes of a group rather than individuals; and they contain episodes which may be transposed or even deleted without destroying the work.

There are several kinds of mimetic transcript, and categories appropriate for story are also applicable to mimetic transcripts: for example, biographical or autobiographical mimetic transcripts. Other categories may include:

Situational mimetic transcript. A mimetic transcript in which meaning is not dependent upon "story" but upon a particular context, such as a mimetic debate, involving narrative elements at only a rudimentary level. It is related to the fictional anecdote in tending to be brief, a whole but usually single episode not involving action in

the Aristotelian sense (only activity), although it may be more extensive. It is often cast essentially in lyric form, and often takes the shape of a mimetic complaint, lament, argument, dialogue or dramatic monologue reported by or tacitly assumed to be reported by another witnessing it. For example, chanson d'aventure such as "I Met My Lady Weil Arrayit" or "I Saw Me Thocht This Hyndir Nicht"; some parables, such as the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-8; Luke 8:4-18) or the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16); and dramatic monologues, such as Robert Browning's My Last Duchess. Situational does not mean static, i.e. purely descriptive, but situational in that it raises an impression of mimetic action by supplying details of an agent's life and thought even though no action takes place and so no change occurs in the characters' circumstances.

Allegorical mimetic transcript. A polysemous mimetic transcript, for example The Owl and the Nightingale, Langland's Piers Plowman, or Dunbar's The Thrissil and the Rois.

Fantastic mimetic transcript. Like fantasy stories, mimetic transcripts not bound by natural probability: for example, Lindsay's The Testament of the Papyngo. Very often they take the form of a dream-vision, such as Pearl, Chaucer's House of Fame and Parliament of Fowls, James I's Kingis Quhair, or Skelton's The Bowge of Court.

As with stories, there may be overlapping categories or combinations of kinds of mimetic transcripts. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's Roman de la Rose, for example, may be regarded as a mimetic transcript which as a love-quest is conventional, allegorical, and fantastic altogether. Or Master John's first tale in The Thre Prestis of Peblis and "The Baris Taile" in the Asloan manuscript's The Talis of the Fyve Bestes may be identified as conventional allegorical mimetic

transcripts. There should be some flexibility in applying these concepts. Further, I shall be using the terminology of narratives--such as dialogue, character, episode, plot--in describing both stories and mimetic transcripts, where these terms are appropriate. It seems less troublesome and confusing to employ standard terminology. Little would be served by needlessly attempting to invent new terms for mimetic transcripts.

The principles elucidated above will be applied throughout the course of my investigation. But perhaps one demonstration will help to clarify the basic distinction between story and mimetic transcript in practical application: a comparison of a tale, Henryson's Robene and Makyne, with a mimetic transcript, The Colkelbie Sow.

It is easily shown that Robene and Makyne fits the criteria of a story detailed above. It has unity, in that a complete action is portrayed in a sequence of episodes that lead logically but not inevitably from one to the next: Makyne approaches Robene and protests her love for him; Robene rejects her, but reverses his decision after she has gone; Robene approaches Makyne in like fashion, declaring his new love for her; she blythely rejects him, ending in as happy a mood as Robene's is miserable. The loss of any component episodes or the disruption of their sequence would seriously affect the story as a whole. The story has a probable but unforeseen outcome, a peripeteia or reversal of fortune occurring when Robene's love-suit is unexpectedly but justly spurned, bringing him from anticipated felicity down into unlooked for misery. Makyne simultaneously enjoys a reversal from a miserable state to a happy one. Anagnorisis accompanies his reversal, for he recognizes the mistakes of his opinions and actions, the moral

choices he made, the foolish part he played in his own downfall. It is an embarrassment that aggravates his pride's suffering. All of the qualities that are essential to a story are clearly operating in the poem.

The Colkelbie Sow,³⁴ in contrast, is a fantastic mimetic transcript, a "tale"-cycle consisting of a prohemium and three parts. Drawing on "fentesy" and "auld wyfis tailis" (II.132; III.152), the poet recounts the improbable adventures of the bourgeois farmer Colkelbie, how he spends three pennies and the wild results of his investments. The poem as a whole lacks unity. Apart from the penny-motif, none of the three parts--an absurd animal fable, an emblematic bourgeois romance of how Flanders took its name, and a triumphantly bourgeois rags-to-riches adventure, respectively--bear any necessary relationship with each other. Each "tale" is separate, and does not develop logically out of antecedent episodes; nor do they together build to a general climax, the results of part three a necessary or probable outcome of events in parts one or two. There is no unity, no causal relationship: the "tales" are superficially linked but not connected. Peripeteia is also conspicuously absent. Colkelbie, the presumed protagonist, does not enjoy or suffer an unexpected reversal of fortune: his pig goes on to fame as a ferocious boar, his son Flanislie and adopted daughter are elevated to the noble classes, and his godson Colkalb is made rich; but Colkelbie himself remains unchanged. Even these three success stories are "accidental" in that those who receive promotion do not

34. In Bannatyne, IV, 297-308. The poet, incidentally, uses the terms bourd (Pr.46), caiss (I.11; III.5, 148), cronicule (Pr.14; III.97), fantesy (Pr.47; I.434, 492), gest (Pr.14), legend (II.55), story (Pr.14; II.131), simple dyte (II.5), taill (II.166; III.152), and text (III.62) more or less indiscriminately in reference to his narrative.

do so as a result of choices they have made or actions they have taken. They are not portrayed as unexpected reversals of state, movement from misery to felicity or ignorance to knowledge (although we may reasonably assume that the characters are made happy by success), but as reversals of condition, in each case a betterment, movement upward on the social scale. Success, however deserving the characters may be, is fostered on them. Without peripeteia there is no anagnorisis, no recognition of a reversal of fortune and no recognition of personal responsibility for that reversal.

Even examined individually the parts do not qualify as single stories. In part one, the poet begins with a didactic riddle. He then answers it, and expounds the contained moral lesson before ever proceeding to his matter (9-37). The adventures of the stolen pig are themselves of secondary interest when the "tale" properly begins: the bulk of the poem is composed of comic and exaggerated lists, swollen lists first of villains at the harlot's feast (51-107), then of fellow pigs rushing to aid the stolen one (154-81), then of herdsmen hurrying to their rescue (207-61), then of peasant dances and songs ranging over the known world (299-384), and concluding the sequence with the overthrow of "all the ydiottis" at the feast (422), effecting the little pig's escape. In the following romance-like history of the great boar he grows into we are presented with a catalogue of adventures rather than a tale of adventure (438-74). There is a distinct lack of unity. The sequence of events follows an internally logical pattern; but the comic lists could be shortened or excised altogether, and the herdsmen's dancing and rescue efforts could be transposed or dropped, without seriously affecting the structure of the tale. The final catalogue of the boar's adventures is connected to the preceding rescue episodes

only by a tenuous thread, that his aided escape allowed the pig to grow into a mighty and heroic animal. There is, of course, no peripeteia for Colkelbie, and merely an accidental reversal of fortune for the threatened pig. It follows no anagnorisis occurs for either character. The "plot" seems to be a clockwork mechanism, set in motion by the poet but not dependent on choices of action made by human agencies. The same diagnosis applies to the final two parts.

The Colkelbie Sow seems to tell three stories. It animates mimetic animal and human characters, dialogue, action (in the general sense of "activity," movement in time and space), and agents' changes of condition if not of fortune. It contains narrative links, and authorial digressions to point out the stories' sources and moral lessons, or to clarify intent, or otherwise to directly address his audience. But The Colkelbie Sow lacks the key elements essential to a story, and so the poem must be considered a mimetic transcript or connected series of mimetic transcripts.

I would note that in the foregoing discussion of structure considerations of genre, tone, and the comparative merits and demerits of Robene and Makyne and The Colkelbie Sow were not directly touched upon. Analysis of structure is here a necessary first step towards aesthetic evaluation.

Yet I am in danger of leaving the reader with the sense that a mimetic transcript is necessarily an inferior or imperfect kind of story, a sickly second cousin, so to speak, of the "real" article. Such an impression would be false. The structure of a story is not innately superior to that of a mimetic transcript; it is merely different, reflecting a different purpose. The Colkelbie Sow presents a sharp structural contrast to Robene and Makyne; but because it is

poorly written it is not wholly satisfactory as an example, for it may be misleading from an aesthetic point of view. The poem is not a superficial collection of episodes that seem sloppily constructed and tenuously strung together simply because it is a mimetic transcript. Choice of structure of course contributes substantially to the finished poem, especially as character development--agents' moral choices in action--is closely tied to plot-line and so peripeteia. But this does not account for The Colkelbie Sow's silly subject, rhetorical inferiority, empty theme, use of undelineated and uninteresting caricatures, or unhappy choice of meter and other features of prosody, all of which function in concert with structure to create the final experience in the reader's mind. The poem is weak on a number of aesthetic grounds. But it could have been quite successful. (Or, to state the opposite argument, it might have been structured as a story and still been unsatisfactory.) A mimetic transcript can be excellent: for example, Christis Kirk of the Grene or Dunbar's Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo, examined in subsequent chapters.

Stories and mimetic transcripts have an equal potential for excellence. Dryden's Mac Flecknoe and Burns' Holy Willie's Prayer, for example, are satires of character assassination, ridiculing their enemies; both, highly ironic in premise and execution, are brilliant triumphs, masterpieces of their kind. Yet Mac Flecknoe is a story; Holy Willie's Prayer is a situational mimetic transcript, a hypocrite's confession and supplication to the Lord.

The basic difference between a story and a mimetic transcript is one of purpose, of emphasis, how intention is patterned. Stories can often appear to have no other point than self-fulfilment; mimetic transcripts almost invariably appear to have been written as a means

of conveying a particular idea or set of ideas. A story concerns itself with, and closely directs itself toward, the expression of plot (muthos). A story may have an underlying theme, but theme is usually subordinate to the plot, made manifest through plot. A mimetic transcript conversely tends to place much greater emphasis on theme (dia-noia). The expression of theme, that is, takes precedence over the vehicle conveying it. Thus, theme-dominated, mimetic transcripts often take form as "dramatic" expressions of observation (e.g. fictional travel books), discourse (e.g. monologue, debate, philosophy, utopian vision), and satire.

Because theme initiates or determines structure, mimetic transcripts may run certain formal risks from the standpoint of imitation. The first is that a mimetic transcript can seem a more artificial, inorganic construct than a story. (However, this is not to suggest that stories do not run this risk as well, nor to automatically equate artificiality with inferiority of design.) Second, the delineation and motivation of character is not essential to a mimetic transcript. Agents who are well-defined, whose choices are free in the circumstances and whose beliefs or motives are clear, better achieve verisimilitude, enhancing our understanding if not identity with them. ("Realism" is highly prized in our age; but here again, realism does not serve every purpose, and should not be automatically equated with highest value.) Agents in mimetic transcripts, however, can remain highly functional without necessarily being more than one-dimensional, abstract personalities. They may exhibit no other motivation than that demanded by the needs of thematic development, existing for the sake of the ideas they express and not the other way around. This occurs with greater frequency in authors who attempt to "tell" their message plainly rather

than demonstrate their ideas in believable action. Authors may do this for want of skill; or because they do not trust in the intelligence of of their readers, and so, ensuring they are clearly understood, directly and sometimes forcibly state their ideas within the mimetic setting. But falling prey to these risks is not inevitable, nor is this distancing effect through thematic design always a disadvantage: for example, distancing can be a distinct boon to the satirist, who usually demands that readers do not identify with the object of ridicule. To whatever purpose, the effective patterning of agents--whether fully developed characters or narrow caricatures--can achieve profound aesthetic delight, structural and thematic potency in both stories and mimetic transcripts. In a strongly didactic age of clearly defined, generally accepted values and of fixed literary traditions, such as the medieval period, no one should be surprised to find an abundance of mimetic transcripts among the literary remains.

iii. Comedy

Writing about humour is both difficult and tedious: for proof we have only to witness Aristophanes, Athens' foremost humorist, being put to sleep first by a philosophical discussion of comedy during the Socratic dialogues. Sober analysis invariably risks destroying those very comic phenomena which go to compose the humorous qualities of a work. But more than merely risking the reader's boredom, one is faced with the problem of necessary inconclusiveness. Definitions of humour have intrigued, and eluded, theorists for centuries; and the debate still continues. Nevertheless, it will be useful to lay some groundwork, however brief, regarding humour, and provide at least a working definition of terms prior to looking at the Middle Scots works themselves.

Modern theories of humour are usually disguised as theories of laughter and the laughable, laughter being not an emotion but the (unreliable) outward physical manifestation of human beings' emotional excess of delight and often surprise when witnessing or thinking of something humorous.³⁵ Humour may not actually produce laughter, but if successful should at least produce a pleasurable emotional climate, gaiety, lightheartedness, a state of freedom from care in which the contrary of seriousness is felt. We are concerned in this discussion solely with the laughter associated with humour, which excludes the laughter of nervousness, hysteria, relief from strain, anger, or other non-humorous occasions when men laugh. Such humour-produced laughter is restricted to homo sapiens and is natural to him ("playfulness" is amply documented in nature but there is so far no conclusive evidence that other animals are self-conscious--a necessary prerequisite--and laugh in the same way or at what humans do); it is associated with a pleasurable feeling; and it is restricted to certain times and conditions. Though people may laugh together and at the same things, laughter is finally a subjective experience: no comic (or serious) objects exist in the natural world, but objects or situations are comic

35. In this section I am generally indebted to D.H. Monro, The Argument of laughter, (Notre Dame, Indiana: 1963); Maria C. Swabey, Comic Laughter, (London & New Haven, Connecticut: 1961); Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Playful Element in Culture, trans. R.F.C. Hull, (London: 1949); Morton Gurewitsch, Comedy: The Irrational Vision, (London & Ithica, New York: 1975); selected essays in Comedy: Meaning and Form, ed. Robert W. Corrigan, (Scranton, Pennsylvania: 1965); "An Essay on Comedy" by George Meredith and "Laughter" by Henri Bergson, ed. Wylie Sypher, (Garden City, New York: 1956); Sigmund Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, trans. James Strachey, (New York: 1960); and especially Elder Olson, The Theory of Comedy, (Bloomington, Indiana: 1968).

or serious only in the perception of the witness. Of course, there are objects and situations which naturally have greater comic potential than others; for example, a man slipping on a banana peel versus a man being flogged, though both involve pain. But there are a variety of subjective factors which must coincide in the perceiver before laughter can occur. In general, however, men laugh primarily at human beings (themselves or others), and secondarily at other creatures (animals, gods, and so on) by analogy or some other relation to the human.

There are many explanations of varying complexity for laughter, none of them necessarily false, but none of them complete or wholly satisfactory. In general it may be said that there are three major groupings of theories attempting to account for the process and state of mind of the laugher: superiority, incongruity, and release from restraint. All of the theories agree that laughter can occur only in the absence of pity or other strong emotions. But thereafter the theories diverge and try variously answering what is laughed at, who does the laughing, and the relation between the object of laughter and the subject who does the laughing. I am aware that in providing but brief summaries of these theories I risk oversimplifying both the ideas they represent and the objections to them. But I suggest that a full study of them would require a book in itself, an unfeasible undertaking, and that finally such a study would not substantially benefit the present discussion.

The superiority theory, also classed as a "moral" theory, provides in its kindest sense that laughter arises out of having a God's-eyeview of the human pageant, a superior distancing, an urbane and indulgent attitude toward the follies of humankind. It assumes the viewing of other human beings from an emotionally neutral and superior vantage,

implying the inferiority of the object being viewed. This involves a judgment of others' morals or mores. Hence it is also known as the degradation theory. Hobbes, stressing the essentially cruel elements involved in making such judgments, called laughter the feeling of "sudden glory," that is, a feeling of unlooked for self-glory. Aristotle and others of his school said that we laugh at what is ugly (morally and physically) but not painful; Bergson saw it stemming from "something mechanical encrusted upon the living," a mental or physical inflexibility unperceived by the object of laughter but perceived by others; and Feibleman more widely claimed that it sprang from a vision of "the world as it is contrasted with the world as it ought to be"--although we must be careful here, for such an idea could be applied to tragic vision as well. The feeling of comic superiority need not be conscious in the laugher, and the object of inferiority (or sudden inferiority) need not be a person but may be an idea, institution, custom, or like abstraction.

The incongruity theory, also known as the "intellectual" or logical-relationship theory, emphasizing surprise, paradox, and contradiction, declares that laughter results from the unexpected collision of concepts, what D.H. Monro cites as instantaneous "universe-changing."³⁶ This involves the abrupt replacement of a serious mental framework with its contrary, the linking of disparate non-serious concepts. Kant views laughter as "an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing"; for Schopenhauer and others paradox is the key, and laughter arises from "the ridicule of a particular thing by exposing its inadequacy when confronted with some general

36. Monro, op. cit., 46.

concept,"³⁷ and vice versa. The Bergsonian mechanics of a fixed state in collision with the desired fluid organic state may also be considered incongruous. A special case of incongruity would be not the conflict of ideas but emotional attitudes, simultaneously accommodating opposing states of feeling.

The release from restraint theory, or "psychological" theory stressing "psychic economy," sees laughter resulting from the legitimate relief of a suppressed wish--basically hostility, sex and indecency (superiority), or simply the demands of reason (incongruity)--a pleasurable escape from the psychic censor through a harmless channel. Laughter for the Freudian school occurs as "repressing energy is freed from its static function of keeping something forbidden under repression and away from consciousness."³⁸ The customs of a society, its basic cultural values, determine what wishes must be suppressed and which can safely be released in certain contexts.

Each of these three main theories has points to recommend it; and, even if each by itself cannot adequately cover all cases when and why men laugh, all are at least partially true. Thus, if one theory does not satisfactorily explain an individual instance of laughter it is probable that another will. The territories of each theory overlap to some degree. Examples in medieval literature may easily be found illustrating each "type" of laughter: Chaucer Miller's Tale alone supplies cases of incongruity in Nicholas's wooing and in his Noah-story; release from restraint in the anal-retentive adventures of the "misdirected kiss"-episode, or Absalom's hostile vengeance; and, of course, superiority. We laugh amusedly throughout, as the scornful

37. *Monro*, p. 151.

38. *Martin Grotjahn*, *Beyond Laughter*, (New York: 1957), 255.

Oxford neighbours do when all is revealed, at the faults and follies of them all.

Individual weaknesses of each theory aside, a general objection to the formulae of all the theories is that they may describe conditions for laughter but do not necessarily do so. The same conditions--dependent on the subjective state of the witness--may result in a variety of other emotional reactions. As Professor Olson has put it, the main fault with the general theories is that they are "multivalent," covering not merely one but many possible emotional states.³⁹ Witnessing the folly and slight moral defects in others can as easily produce pity or anxiety or disappointment as superiority laughter. The universe is full of paradoxes and incongruities, yet we are not constantly laughing but may react with awe, joy, wonder, or perplexity; moreover, we laugh as often at fulfilled expectation as at humorous surprise. Release from restraint may as easily effect revulsion or anger as delight; one man's pleasurable release from restraint may be another's vision of "bad taste."

Likewise, this problem of multivalence arises in compiling classifications of humour, as D.H. Monro, modifying James Sully's list in his Essay on Laughter (London: 1903), notes himself in setting forth ten general cases when we laugh:⁴⁰

- (a) Any breach of the usual order of events (unexpected and without serious consequences)
- (b) Any forbidden breach of the usual order of events (comic vice)
- (c) Indecency (comically suggestive, bawdy; not lewd)
- (d) Importing one situation into what belongs in another (incongruity)

39. Olson, op. cit., 7-10.

40. Monro, p. 40. The parenthetic specifications are mine.

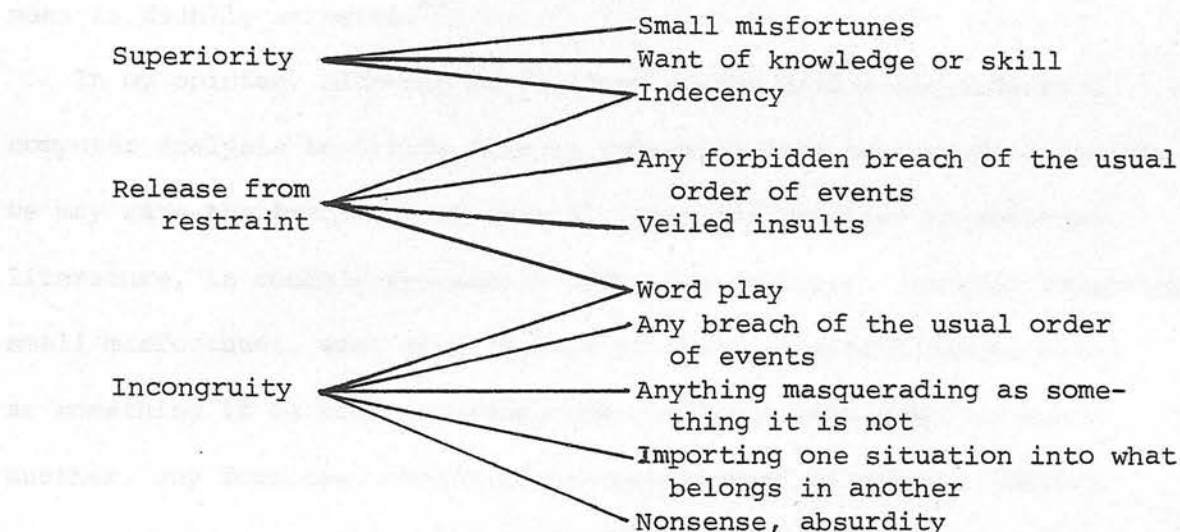
- (e) Anything masquerading as something it is not
- (f) Word play (puns, allusions, euphemisms, "wit")
- (g) Nonsense (and the Absurd)
- (h) Small misfortunes (non-serious disasters)
- (i) Want of knowledge or skill (stupidity, ineptitude)
- (j) Veiled insults (or non-veiled, e.g. flytings)

We may laugh at examples of all these cases, but not necessarily.

These cases also include many situations when we do not laugh: any breach of the usual order of events, for example, might beget an unpleasant or very serious emotional reaction--such as the wonder produced by the Christian boy's singing through his cut throat in Chaucer's Prioress' Tale. Further, the opposite case is often comically valid. We laugh at indecency (Nicholas's farting), or excessive fastidiousness (Absalom's squeamishness about farting), or, especially, two such opposites joined in confrontation. We laugh at small misfortunes and even pain (John the Carpenter's cuckolding and broken arm), but also at large misfortunes (the Summoner being snatched off to Hell by a devil in Chaucer's Friar's Tale); or at unexpected reversals of bad fortune, for instance the clerks' recovery of their lost flour in Chaucer's Reeve's Tale. We laugh at want of knowledge (John the Carpenter's incredulousness at the "second Flood" warning) or skill (Absalom's courting techniques), but also at excessive intelligence (Nicholas's elaborate trickery). Unmasking may be as humorous as pretence; unveiled insults as funny as veiled so long as we are not personally involved--and not always then; unintentional mispronunciation as comic as deliberate word-play; and nonsense annoying rather than amusing.

We must take into account the difficulties and inadequacies of each major literary theory and classification system (possibly more useful in describing literary works than the real world), noting that none of the theories are necessarily mutually exclusive or false, and that a

number of the cases of humour are coincidental to some degree. One broadly useful exercise is to combine the classes of humour outlined above with theories of laughter and apply it to the medieval period to see if any general trends can be detected. I offer the following chart, acknowledging more interplay than is shown, breaking down the general cases for laughter by major category:



Many examples of all ten general cases of humour are to be found in medieval comic literature; but naturally certain types of humorous plot-construction or humorous narrative devices are utilized with greater frequency than others. Indecency is widely used, as many tales concern themselves with man's animal nature (again, The Miller's Tale comes most readily to mind);⁴¹ and many plots turn on trickery or folly or both (cf. The Reeve's Tale or The Summoner's Tale). On the opposite end of the scale, word-play is more rare: few characters in medieval literature--often to be found in medieval cycle or morality dramas--are wits, punsters, or language-fracturing Dogberrys; although usually such

41. More than sixty percent of the surviving French fabliaux deal with sexual (mis)alliances: discussed more fully in Chapter Three, pp. 182-85.

characteristics are associated with figures of comic vice. Insults tend not to be veiled but direct (discounting the insulting aspects of comic treachery); and nonsense, especially the absurd, is more modern in conception. The medieval mind was curiously freer to invent and laugh at comic blasphemy, and even gross cruelty, than our post-Romantic sensibilities allow. Even then, however, the justice of cruel treatment is usually stressed.⁴²

In my opinion, although we would of course need a comprehensive computer analysis to verify this as something more than studied belief, we may rate the frequency of general cases for laughter in medieval literature, in roughly descending order, as follows: (strong) indecency, small misfortunes, want of knowledge or skill, anything masquerading as something it is not, importing one situation into what belongs in another, any forbidden breach of the usual order of events; (weaker) any breach of the usual order of events, veiled insults, word-play, nonsense. Accepting at least the first half of this listing, it is apparent then that much of the humour of medieval narratives--dependent largely on indecency, small misfortunes, and want of knowledge or skill--is judgmental, directly or by implication, and would be classed in the main as soliciting the laughter of superiority, "moral" laughter. Medieval humour on the whole tends to be direct and unsophisti-

42. Examples of gross cruelty in medieval comic tales might include the French fabliau Les Trois Boçus, in which three dwarves are heartlessly drowned; the seventh tale of the eighth day in Boccaccio's Il Decamerone, in which a scholar, in vengeance for fruitlessly waiting all night in the snow for his ladylove, traps her nude atop a tower in the July sun until she nearly dies from exposure; the fifty-sixth tale in the Burgundian collection Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles, "The Wife, the Priest, the Maid, and the Wolf," wherein a cuckolded gentleman traps his faithless wife, her priest-lover, and pandering maid in an animal pit with a wolf, piles in brush, and burns them all together; or the English Mery Iest of Dane Hew Munk of Leceistre, in which a lecherous monk is killed by a jealous husband and then "slain" four more times by others trying to dispose of the body. Other examples of cruelty could easily be mustered.

cated; its main themes are solatium and stultitia, sex and folly.

This study is concerned with comic verse narratives of the non-dramatic kind. Strictly speaking, the term "comedy" should be applied to dramatic forms. Like dramatic comedies, comic verse-tales do not necessarily have to be humorous, although they may, but should have a "happy" as opposed to sorrowful outcome. In a Christian context, for example the saint's legend genre, the protagonist may be killed; yet this apparently sad resolution must be considered a happy ending, with the slain hero or heroine received triumphantly in Heaven as a result. There is a sense, then, in which a Christian story of martyrdom may be considered a comedy. But throughout this study I shall use the term "comic," unless otherwise specified (e.g. Christian joy), more generally to mean facetious, amusing, humorous, causing laughter; and apply "comic" to characterizations, behaviour, beliefs, and situations (e.g. "comic exposure of fraud" or "peasant-brawlers' comic battles") without necessarily referring back to the above list and specifying cases as comic unmasking, or want of knowledge or skill. The same will hold true for the term "irony," once certain principles about irony are established in the discussion of Henryson's work.⁴³

Satire is distinguished from but included in the category of humour. The general aim and techniques of humour and satire are essentially the same, revealing the folly in human thought and behaviour to a receptive audience. The primary difference between them is the degree of sympathy extended to the protagonist(s) or object(s) of laughter. Humour is more sympathetic in its treatment than satire, more good-natured, understanding, and humane. Satire is actively unsympa-

43. See Chapter Two, below pp. 143-162.

thetic toward folly, unsparing of the agent's feelings, contemptuous, or, to varying degrees of hostility, a playful attack. Satire usually has a clearer--or smaller--target in its sights, more specific evils and real perpetrators, than humour aims at. Satire, that is, is more particular in its focus, exposing the enemy or enemies within society. The nature of those enemies and the strength of the threat they pose (evident in the force with which it is countered) varies according to the structure or kind of society under defence. There are two basic kinds of satire, serious satire and ridiculing satire. Their elements are the same but they differ in emphasis. Serious satire is primarily aimed at correcting folly and/or vice in others, and secondarily aimed at exposing persons, things, or institutions and ideas to general ridicule. Ridiculing satire reverses the order of these two concerns, castigating first and only secondarily offering to correct, most often contenting itself with destruction, exposing a victim to ridicule.

The poet has many tools at his disposal whereby to create humour and the necessary climate of contra-concern in which humour flourishes: exaggeration and hyperbole, understatement, irony, ridicule, devalued metaphor or absurd comparison, allusion, pun, double entendre. But though tone and diction play an important and necessary role, the poet chiefly grounds his humour on his narrative's action and characterization, the ludicrous or ridiculous escapades of his story's actors arising from the ludicrous or ridiculous nature of their appearance, thinking, or behaviour.

As mentioned, a narrative's plot-line may be simple (a single action, usually unfolding sequentially, as in The Reeve's Tale) or interwoven (joining two or more actions as the Nicholas-Alison-John and Nicholas-Alison-Absalom plots dovetail in The Miller's Tale). In med-

ieval tales the strong tendency is toward single actions. Reduced to the most basic,⁴⁴ there are two major comic plot-types, with numerous possible variations, in humorous literature: plots of folly and plots of cleverness. In turn, these two major plot-types have four basic variations in the action: (folly) the well-intentioned or ill-intentioned fool succeeds or fails; (cleverness) the well-intentioned or ill-intentioned wit succeeds or fails. These types may operate concurrently, meting out defeat for one character, success for another. Humorous plots should also involve the absurd to be funny: the fool may comically succeed by happy chance (the fool may commit the right act by chance or his wrong act may accidentally produce the right results), or he may comically defeat himself at every turning. The clever man may lead the action, ridiculing others, or himself be defeated by acting sensibly but failing through accident or having his right actions unexpectedly produce the wrong results. Yet though chance is often involved, intrusions of deus ex machina kinds of accident tend to reduce comic potential. Chance may be involved, enriching the plot; but humour depends to a large extent upon the deeds, motives, and intentions of the agents. Comic reversals are distinct from, but closely allied to, peripeties. Humorous plots need not be continuously funny--

44. Olson, op. cit., 52. Though he discusses only dramatic comedy, I find his categories fundamentally appropriate for all comic narratives. This simplification is not intended to do away with other kinds of description, only to provide a clear basic distinction. Nor is this description intended to imply that one element may be said to dominate when combinations of types occur within one whole. Combinations often occur in complex plots with several characters, each working out a personal fate. In comic wit-butt relationships, for instance, wits usually succeed and their dupes usually fail, and we have then cleverness and folly working in conjunction in one plot. The plot cannot be characterized as cleverness or folly only; although fortune may be seen as determining the kind of plot it is.

indeed, suffering or the threat of harm in narrative humour is often a necessary feature--but must be comic overall. In general, agents of the action are rewarded or punished as they deserve (frequently there is a "moral" force or implied moral governance of their fates), but not necessarily. Comic plots may resolve with good fortune accorded all around, somewhat rare; or bad fortune all around; or, most often, with a mixture of both. In black comedy, wickedness is rewarded and virtue is not.

Like plots, characters themselves may be simple (flat, stereotypical, caricature-like) or complex (well-rounded, emotionally and intellectually multifaceted, functioning with seeming autonomy). Again, the medieval tendency is toward simple rather than complex, relying on situations and comic actions to carry the story. Characters can be comic for a variety of reasons: their deeds, beliefs, emotions, desires, physical traits (speech, gestures, appearance), and combinations of all these features, at variance with reality or "normal" thinking and behaviour. Comic characters must not be monstrous, arousing revulsion or other strong emotions in readers, but should be unlike us enough so that we cannot take them seriously. This enables us to laugh not only at their behaviour and aspirations but also at their pains, sufferings, and problems. It is easiest to laugh at an inferior character, one who is deficient morally (vicious or base), intellectually (foolish, ignorant, inexperienced), or both; but not necessarily, for we may laugh with the success of a clever man (such as a wit juggling one or more masks or pretences), or even at a serious person if they have a fixed trait (say absentmindedness, megalomania, or meticulous pronunciation) that strikes us as incongruous with "normal" behaviour.

Characters, so long as we are in a position not to take them seriously, may be ridiculous or ludicrous.⁴⁵ There is of course some overlap between the two, but in general the ridiculous character is inferior in himself, wanting morally or intellectually or both, and/or in his deeds, taking faulty actions. He must be demonstrably in error. That is, vice is not ridiculous in itself, but only in relation to the character's behaviour: his actions must be wrong even from the point of view of the baseness or ignorant ambitions he embodies, so that a drunkard would find a comic drunkard's behaviour ridiculous. A ludicrous character need not be inferior, but his absurdities result from natural mistake (chance) or deception by another (trickery accidental or deliberate). The ludicrous character need not act himself but be caught up in accident or the treacherous contrivances of someone else. All of this presupposes standards, ethical, mechanical (physical behaviour), intellectual, and other bases for judgment, against which we may compare the thought and actions of comic characters. In a society without values and cultural norms there can be little humour regarding human behaviour aside from comic deviations in custom.

iv. Medieval Laughter

Omnis homo risibilis est

The theories of humour I have been discussing are of course modern

45. Again I am indebted to Olson, pp. 15-16. Wit he defines as "intellectual excellence" (p. 21) which exposes the ridiculous (i.e. the butt). Butt-figures are invariably ridiculous; wit-figures in comic literature are often the protagonists and so often appear morally "neutral" or admirable (intellectually heroic), but they may be ludicrous, caught up in circumstances beyond their control, or, like the fox in Henryson's Morall Fabillis, may be themselves ridiculous.



in origin. We must also try to account, however tentatively, for medieval ideas of the risible as well. Such an evaluation is complicated by the fact that few philosophers and no medieval British poets have left us extensive, coherent statements on comic literary art or theories of laughter. Most statements on laughter are fragmentary, often received opinions (taken, for example, from writers in classical antiquity), and almost always concerned with moral considerations. Ideas about laughter are scattered throughout a disparate body of writings--encyclopedias, courtesy books, sermons, exempla, philosophical treatises, and so on--from all over Europe and from the classical period onwards. No one may expect even tradition-hardened ideas to remain unaltered through a thousand years and over an entire continent. The following survey, then, must be regarded as somewhat tenuous, drawing ideas from a variety of (chiefly British) sources and ages into a reasonably but somewhat artificially homogeneous pattern. It must be borne in mind that, characteristic of these Church-dominated ages, most of the statements are ethical in nature, admonishing, exhorting, warning, instructing. The bias is heavily one-sided and idealistic, if not misrepresenting the age at least not telling the complete story. Nevertheless, having laid out these cautions, I feel that there is a strong degree of unity and continuity--especially regarding the mores of laughter--from Greco-Roman times through the eighteenth century.

Laughter was well-recognized in the medieval period as one of the four properties of mankind. Man is the risible animal, the only one in fact that laughs: "Homo est substantia animata, rationalis, mortalis, risus capax," and "nam omnis homo risibile est, et nulla alia

species risibili potest proprio nuncuparis."⁴⁶ But laughter, though a "property" of mankind, "had nothing to do with [man's] essence"; the mortale rationale distinguished men from the animals and angels both, but mortale (mortality) and rationale (reason) are concepts reconcilable only in laughter.⁴⁷ Laughter was thought to arise from the milt or spleen, as anger from gall, wisdom from the heart, and love from the liver. According to Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae, XI, i, 127: "splen dictum a supplemento ex contraria parte factum existimant."⁴⁸ Laughter was not only recognized and catalogued by medieval philosophers, it flourished throughout the Middle Ages despite the predominant ideals of religious asceticism.⁴⁹

From what we can tell of the visibly sombre Anglo-Saxon period laughter was predominantly male, "the roaring of men." But there are

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46. Alcuin, dial., c.13, and Boethius, In Isagogen Porphyrii Commentata, passus 80, 5 ss, cited by Helen Adolf, "On Medieval Laughter," Speculum, 22 (1947), 251-53. This emotional "fact" is repeated in Ratis Raving, ed. R. Girvan, STS 3rd Ser. 11, (Edinburgh & London: 1939), p. 32, lines 1120-23.
47. Adolf, p. 253. On laughter's essence she quotes St. Thomas Aquinas: "Non omne, quod est proprium alicui, pertinet, ad essentiam euis sicut risibile homini." Regarding the reconciliation of mortale and rationale, compare also Cursor Mundi, ed. Richard Morris, EETS O.S. 57, 59, 62, 66, 68, 99, (London: 1874-93), I, 89, when Adam laughs for the first time, hearing that he shall die: "Quen he herd he suld liue na mare / þan he logh, bot neuer are" (1401-02). And in Charles Baudelaire's essay "On the Essence of Laughter," in Corrigan, Comedy: Meaning and Form, op. cit., 455, he notes "Laughter is essentially human, it is, in fact, essentially contradictory; that is to say that it is at once a token of an infinite grandeur and an infinite misery--the latter in relation to the Absolute Being of whom man has an inkling, the former in relation to the beasts. It is from the perpetual collision of these two infinities that laughter is struck."
48. Isidore of Seville, Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm, ed. W.M. Lindsay, 2 vols., (Oxford: 1911). See also Beatrice White, "Medieval Mirth," Anglia, 78 (1960), 284-301.
49. Ernst R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask, (New York: 1953), 422: the Church "left all possibilities open, from rigoristic rejection to benevolent toleration," stressing, of course, moderation and decency (p. 420).

six words representing different types of laughter ranging from gladness to contempt and gloating to drunken hilarity, and the main device for humour was litotes, ironic understatement. The Icelandic sagas are full of comic gods like Loki, and absurd goings-on. By the twelfth century Latin wit is strongly noticeable, as are Latin parodies, satires, and burlesques.⁵⁰ A considerable amount of mirth is to be had in the songs of the troubadours and trouveres; fabliaux, flowering in the thirteenth century, were already fading in popularity by the late fourteenth century when the urbane and facetious Chaucer takes up the genre; essentially humorous Aesopic fables and the Roman de Renart tale-collections are in abundance; and everywhere rings laughter from the "roaring of men" in a romance war-council to the ultra-feminine "Te he" of Alison at her bedroom window. Recorded laughs run a wide gamut, including "a large capacity for derision, impudent wit, good-natured fun, sharp ridicule, and occasionally...hysterical mirth."⁵¹ In short, though the emphasis is on superiority-laughter, medieval people displayed a large capacity for enjoyment, indulging all varieties of laughter. Life and human nature being what they are, there is little significant difference through the ages in the reasons for laughter. Types of laughter we enjoy today, perhaps even some types usually forbidden us (racialist, blasphemous, grotesque), were commonly enjoyed in the medieval period.

For medieval people there was proper and improper laughter. The Middle Ages inherited from the Greeks and Romans moral notions of laughter's propriety, notions strengthened and enlarged by the human-

50. J.P.S. Tatlock, "Medieval Laughter," Speculum, 21 (1946), 289-94.

51. White, op. cit., 301.

istic impulses and eschatological attitudes of the Church.⁵² Laughter, for Aristotle, as later for Aquinas,⁵³ was not a highest good but simply a relaxation, a pleasant amusement, preparatory to the serious work of virtue. It is a necessary and agreeable feature of life but not unduly important, and like all human activities capable of abuse if not checked by reason. It was considered proper to ridicule vice and folly, but early on the power of ridicule was recognized and feared. Plato, in his Republic, preferred to depend on reason rather than ridicule to check misbehaviour, and so forbade comics and satirists from attacking its citizens. The Republic's guardians were to speak ill of no one, and not laugh at the gods or persons of worth, but avoid excess and seek propriety. For the Greeks and Romans alike "Do not laugh at the unfortunate" became a maxim, a maxim passed down to the Middle Ages in a variety of courtesy manuals. Careful distinctions were drawn between good-natured and illiberal jests, as philosophers and rhetoricians both were concerned with the ethics of laughter, that is, the propriety of laughter in kind, time, place, and respecting persons. In general, it was considered wrong to laugh at matters of import--politics, religion, death, great personages--and

52. I am indebted in the following discussion to M.A. Grant, The Ancient Rhetorical Theories of the Laughable, University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, No. 21, (Madison, Wisconsin: 1924), 7-148.

53. Glending Olson, "The Medieval Theory of Literature for Refreshment and Its Use in the Fabliau Tradition," Studies in Philology, 71 (1974), 291-313, notes that relaxation was a low-scale gift from God, according to Aquinas holding a legitimate place in human affairs between excessive jocularity and defective harshness of spirit: there is "no question of [his] defence of relaxation and the recognition of its attainment through 'delectatione ludi'" (p. 302).

all those deserving of pity.⁵⁴ Likewise, unbridled laughter in a gentleman was unseemly, destroying dignity. A gentleman should be tolerant and not misanthropic, and meditate on serious things. He should be neither too serious (excess) nor play the buffoon (defect), but strike a proper balance, laughing in moderation when it was appropriate. Three main points distinguished the good-natured from illiberal jest: frequency of jesting (always and everything for a laugh); language used (clever innuendo versus invective, abuse, and obscenity); and pain inflicted. Illiberal jesting did not become a gentleman; but true wittiness, avoiding buffoonery and boorishness, did. In oratory Cicero made strict distinctions between varieties of wit and the types of laughter to be elicited, for wit properly used excited emotions and sympathy, and made the speaker appear just, humane, and intelligent. Scurrilitas, illiberal ridicule and invective, was to be avoided because of its non-intellectual and undignified nature; so was malicious, pain-inflicting petulans, and on the opposite end of the scale, rustic humour. It was better to use dicax, short, stinging verbal witticisms, though sparingly, and rely on facetis, mild and urbane humour depending on substance of thought, provoking good-natured and sympathetic laughter. Invective was at best suited to contentio; and irony and "serious" humour, marked by decorum and a "kindly spirit," suited to sermo.⁵⁵ The language of everyday life, that is, the "low" or "plain" style, was appropriate for the comic, a conven-

54. Bacon's "Essay on Discourse" adheres closely to this outline: see Francis Bacon, Essays, (London & New York: 1902; rpt. 1975), 137-39.

55. Grant, op. cit., 148.

tion later followed in writing humorous verse narratives.⁵⁶ The ancient Greeks and Romans, then, favoured a mild, benign, good-natured laughter, and were careful to stress ethical principles, proper decorum, and moderation lest they be considered at fault. The emphasis is on social ethics rather than on spiritual ethics.

These ideas of laughter's propriety were handed down virtually intact to the Middle Ages. Many were the occasions, like the Christmas gathering of King Arthur's court in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,⁵⁷ when companies were brought together, and at such glad times courtly ladies and gentlemen might

With merpe & mynstralsye, with meteȝ at hor wylle
 þat maden as mery as any men moȝten
 With laȝying of ladies, with loteȝ of bourdes.
 (1952-54)

Discretion and temperance were to be observed in so festive an atmosphere, which called for self-restraint. According to the Polonius-like precepts of such courtesy books as The Secreta Secretorum:

Play not to myche, ne lagh not moche, ffor Saloman
 Sayth, "laghyng Is alway in the mouthe of the fole,"
 and the fole enhawsyth his voyce whan he laghyth. The
 wys man weneth he Softe laghyth. Ther is tyme of laghyng,
 tyme of wepyng, tyme of Speche, and tyme of be-
 yng still. In two causes sholde no wys man lagh, that
 Is to witte, in despite of another man, ne for that
 myschefe anothyr Is betyde. Who-so laghyth when he
 sholde not, he Is holde dyshoneste; And who-so neuer
 laghes, he Is ouer estraunge in company. Shewe thy
 witte, and greue no man; whan thou shalt Play, Of vel-
 eyne the nedeth to kepe. Thou Shalte lagh wythout gryn-
 nyng, Speke wythout cry or noyse-makynge, Goo wythout
 Slouthe, Reste wyth-out dyshoneste.⁵⁸

56. Curtius, op. cit., 387n, points out that "Dante (Epistle to Can Grande) still regards comedy as a narrative poetic genre in the low style ('remissus est modus et humilis, quia locutio vulgaris')." So "where we think we see 'realism' we are dealing with a literary convention."

57. Ed. J.R.R. Tolkein and E.V. Gordon, 2nd ed. rev. Norman Davis, (Oxford: 1967).

58. Secreta Secretorum, ed. Robert Steele, EETS E.S. 74, (London: 1898), 58.

This advice is attuned to the spirit and letter of the ancient moralists. Plunging too frequently into the cup of good fellowship could produce some very unpleasant, unwise, and reputation-damaging behaviour. Indeed, according to The Cloud of Unknowing,⁵⁹ Chapter 53:

Som rowyn wiþ þeire armes in tyme of here spekyng, as hem nedid for to swymme ouer a grete water. Som ben euermore smyling and leiþing at iche oper worde þat þei speke, as they weren gigelotes & nice japyng jogelers lackyng kontenaunce. Semeli cher were wiþ sobre & demure beryng of body & mirþe in maner.

Ladies were likewise expected to conform to codes of decorous conduct and bear themselves appropriately. According to Chaucer's Parson,⁶⁰ discussing vanity in female attire, "It is a greet folye a womman to have fair array outward and in hirself be foul inward. / A wyf sholde eek be mesurable in lookyng and in beryng and in lawghyng, and discreet in alle hire wordes and hire dedes." This "bodily bearing" is especially important to a dignified personage and those of authority. A king's deportment was of course closely watched:

And of all thir, kepe the that thou laugh never our hiely and our oft tymis, for it is a thing ryght evill sittand a prince or ony persone honourable. And traist wele that mekle lauchter gerris a persone sone seme alde, and lakkis reverence and honouris, and engenderis vilipensioun and lichtlynes quhen it excedis.⁶¹

Codes of medieval courtesy, following the proscriptions of the ancients, required that a man laugh moderately and with restraint, striking the mean between excessive sobriety and too-easily provoked buffoonery, buffoonery which, curiously, not only is unseemly but hastens senility.

59. Ed. Phyllis Hodgson, EETS O.S. 218, (London & Oxford: 1944), 99.

60. See Chaucer, The Parson's Tale, I.935. Cf. also the "Documenta Matris ad Filiam," in Ratis Raving, op. cit., 81, advising that women were expected to be "Nocht lowd of lauchtir na of langage crouss" (15).

61. "The Buke of the Governauce of Princis," in Gilbert of the Haye's Prose Manuscript, ed. J.H. Stevenson, 2 vols., STS 1st Ser. 44, 62, (Edinburgh & London: 1901-14), I, 98. Cf. also Secreta Secretorum, op. cit., 58.

One should not laugh in "despite," that is, in scorn at another; and one should never laugh at the misfortunes of others. To disregard these precepts was to put into jeopardy one's reputation, wisdom, health, and honour.

But restraint in laughter was not only proper to decorum and temperance, it was also recommended so as to avoid sin. Spiritual ethics were overlaid above the basic layer of social ethics. Excessive laughing per se was not considered a sin, but it had decidedly perilous associations and certainly opened the sensual gates, allowing sin to enter:

I say not þat alle þese vnsemely contenaunces be grete synnes in hem-self, ne 3it all þoo þat done hem ben grete synners hem-self. Bot I sey if þat þees vnsemely & unordeinde contenaunces be gouernors of þat man þat doþ hem, in so mochel þat he may not leue hem whan he wile: þan I say þat þei ben tokenes of pride & coryourste of witte, & of vnordeynde schewyng & couetise of knowyng, & Specyaly þei ben verrai tokenes of vnstabelnes of mynde...⁶²

The "pride & coryouste of witte"--recalling Adam and Eve's lapse in Paradise--are qualities which "meynteyn errour," and often lead to an heretical frame of mind. It was better, for the sake of the soul and the habitual practice of virtue, to forego a little the delights of the world, including laughter and merriness:

That penaunce doing and suffring may renne forþ wip uss of opere vertues and wipoute letting of hem may be schewid in þis wise: Euery day at our meel we mowe forbere sum kinde of mete or of drynke and sum morsel which lyketh vs to take, or in sum oper maner. Also euery day in ech houre of þe day we mowe forbere certeyn vsis of oure outward wittis, as is of slyt, of speche, of taast, of þou3t, of lauging, of japing and of bourding; þou3 not al, 3it sum; þou3 not alwey, 3it at certeyn tymes.⁶³

62. Cloud of Unknowing, op. cit., 99.

63. The Reule of Crysten Religioun by Reginald Pecock, ed. William C. Greet, EETS O.S. 171, (London & Oxford: 1927), 394.

Excessive laughter, numbered among this world's sensual delights virtually alongside gay apparel and bodily lusts, was regarded with a degree of suspicion,⁶⁴ as an outward sign of vanity and folly, even wickedness, the first downward step in a moral descent potentially harmful in this life and the next. Laughter could be seen as a necessary, enjoyable, even desirable human activity; but improper or excessive laughter was construable as a moral lapse.

The admonitions of moralists against discourtesy and venial malefaction of course should not be regarded as pictures of actual behaviour at court--though it was desired and is certainly possible--but reminders of the ideal. Spiritual warnings may have applied to Everyman, but courtesy and bearing were primarily the concerns of the noble classes and those with upper class pretensions. Medieval humorous verse narratives cut across class barriers. They were not concerned with restrained and decorous laughter--at most important to the highest ranks of society--but with provoking unbounded merriment in all companies. Chaucer may have warned his noble listeners of the churlishness to come in the Miller's tale and to skip a few leaves ahead, but surely that mock-proviso did not put anyone off but only served to whet their comic expectations. There is little evidence that court circles were offended by essentially immoral stories, and indeed evidence to the contrary: consider, for example, Boccaccio's Il Decamerone or the fifteenth century Burgundian collection Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles, prose story-cycles aimed at or commissioned by the nobility,

64. The Middle English Dictionary, ed. Sherman M. Kuhn, et. al., 5 vols. (in progress), (Ann Arbor, Michigan: 1952+), V, 715, notes that a secondary meaning of laughter is "A vice; propensity to evil; moral weakness; sin; offense; misdeed." This secondary meaning cited is chiefly supported by examples from 12th and 13th century homiletic material which shows laughter as a sign of or in conjunction with wrong-doing, often fleshly lust.

just as they commissioned psalters and Books of Hours. Nor can we assume courtiers frowned on the ridiculous escapades depicted in rude tales, especially since most of the extant stories are set firmly in the middle class, so noblemen would be laughing down at the lower classes and not at peers; though perhaps, as both Chaucer and Boccaccio variously indicate, the nobility were expected to disapprove, just as they were expected to be noble, wise, free, loyal, courteous, and all the rest of the conventions expressed in romance literature. Henryson, in Orpheus and Eurydice, expounds an established principle when he states "It is contrair the Lawes of nature / A gentill man to be degenerate" (8-9).⁶⁵ But, contrary to this ideal, there is good evidence that the haut courtois enjoyed such humour and patronized the poets, clerics, and minstrels who produced it: we have only to look at the all-embracing variety of Chaucer's or Dunbar's court-produced work for well-known examples. Travelling minstrels would recite the same tales at village fairs, or friaries, or a nobleman's court. That etiquette books took pains to make the nobility conscious of their behaviour is an indication that courtiers, as well as ordinary citizens, probably did what came naturally to them, and for propriety and their souls' sakes needed authoritative nudging to check their impulses.

It seems likely that medieval society at all levels enjoyed saint's legends, romances, and fabliaux; but, as we have seen in Bannatyne's preface to his collection, "matter" distinguished tales in a hierarchy of moral significance. Consideration of spiritual ethics tacitly or explicitly overlaid all art, as it did thought and deed. The Church's influence, especially in the drama it sponsored, was broadly pervasive,

65. Henryson, 132. He explores the idea in the first two stanzas.

affecting even thoroughly secular and indecent stories. This influence usually took the form of the didactic or "moral" lessons appended to a significant percentage of medieval humorous tales, lessons occasionally contrived or outright inappropriate, apparently added to lend an air of legitimacy to tales obviously devoted to entertainment. In looking at theories justifying recreational literature it is first necessary to discuss an aspect of ecclesiastical influence, to explore the background of what might be best styled as "religious laughter."

Religious laughter,^{65a} human and divine, encompasses several types, chiefly representing either spiritual enlightenment or irreligious ignorance, often the laughter of joy (unity) or the laughter of scorn (triumph), both of them species of superiority-laughter. Divine laughter, which never embraces humour, is virtually non-existent, at least in the Bible. The Deity in the New Testament makes no anthropomorphic visitations at all; and, as Wycliffite preachers, the Cursor Mundi, and William Langland among others were careful to point out, Christ, though He wept with compassion for humanity, is never recorded as having laughed: "The fader þat me forth brouchte . filius dei he hoteþ / That neuere lyede ne laughwede . in Al hus lyf-tyme."⁶⁶ The God of the Old Testament, with undisguised human weaknesses, is likewise never shown laughing with pleasure, although (usually "future") scornful laughter is attributed to Him on a few occasions, as in Psalms 37:13, 58:9, and 2:4: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision."⁶⁷ The God of the Old Testament, jealous covenant-maker, can only be imagined laughing in scorn, that

66. William Langland's Vision of Piers the Plowman, C-Text, ed W.W. Skeat, EETS O.S. 54, 67, 81, (London & Oxford: 1873-77), Passus III, 31-32.

67. This is a vision of God as the archetypal ironist: see D.C. Muecke, Irony, (London: 1970), 37.

65a. In the following discussion of religious laughter I am much indebted to Dr. R.D.S. Jack, whose forthcoming book on the subject, Patterns of Divine Comedy, I had seen in typescript.

is, judgmentally, in superiority, at His wayward creatures, for nothing can be unknown and so incongruous to Him.

Laughter, then, is primarily a human--usually a flawed human--activity, existing in the Bible on several moral planes. There is the laughter of righteous delight, as those beloved of the Lord are shown God's law ("And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them," Nehemiah 8:12); or divine favour, as when the house of Israel laughs in triumphal joy upon release from captivity in Zion (Psalm 126). There is the laughter of good people deficient in understanding, as when Abraham and Sarah are told that though of great age she will bear the child Issac and they laugh at the incongruity of it, unmindful that the Author of nature's laws may suspend them as it pleases (Genesis 17:17, 18:12);⁶⁸ or even good men laughing in scorn at the incongruity of divine miracles, as Jairus' family bitterly laughs at Jesus' suggestion that their dead girl merely sleeps, only to be "astonished" when the girl comes forward (Luke 8:52-53). Had these righteous people of the Old and New Testaments a complete--that is, God-like--understanding they would not have found the idea of miraculous superventions of natural law impossibly incongruous. For the most part, however, the righteous do not laugh, in scorn, bitterness, or otherwise. Humorous laughter is almost never depicted, and often is mentioned in the context of waywardness by psalmists and prophets who warn that unless iniquity is put away mirth will stop ("I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness," Jeremiah

68. Compare the tropological treatment of Sarah's laughter in The Sex Werkdayis and Agis, in Asloan, I, 313, lines 20-25.

7:34); or laughter was regarded in wisdom literature as a sign of folly and vanity ("the heart of fools is in the house of mirth," Ecclesiastes 7:4). Indeed, it is the unenlightened, the wicked, and the enemies of God and His people who laugh: King David laments that he is despised by his people and "laughed to scorn" for putting his trust in the Lord (Psalm 22:6-8); the enemies of Israel "laugh among themselves" at Israel's punishment (Psalm 80:6); the Philistines "make sport" of blinded Samson, so perishing in spiritual darkness en masse (Judges 16:23-27); and in the New Testament Herod "mocks" Jesus when they are brought face to face (Luke 23:11), and Jesus' executioners make mocking jests on Calvary (Mark 15:18-20, Luke 23:35-38). For the spiritually enlightened, those possessing access to the superiority of the divine vision, such instances represent different levels of spiritual irony.

Clearly, laughter other than righteous joy has negative moral connotations, as most who laugh humorously are on the wrong side of the law, at least foolish if not wicked. The position the Bible consistently holds to is that "sorrow is better than laughter: for by sadness of countenance the heart is made better" (Proverbs 14:13);⁶⁹ but the righteous man's laughter, the laughter of joy, shall be forthcoming in the Kingdom of God, the true man's dwelling: "Blessed are ye that weep, for ye shall laugh" (Luke 6:21). St. Paul viewed sober cheer as

69. Compare An Alphabet of Tales, ed. Mary M. Banks, EETS O.S. 126, 127, (London: 1904), 345, Tale No. 507: "Valerius tells how after þe same fray þer was a womman in þe cetie, and message come vnto hur at hur son was dead; and scho went home vnto hur howse & was passand hevye. So at þe laste sho sett hur down to mete, and sodanlie hur son come in, and als tyte as sho saw hym, for ioy sho wex evyn oute of hur mynde. And so it was more suffrable vnto hur, þe sorow of dead, þan was þe mirthe of life."

behaviour more appropriate to saints, urging neither "foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving thanks" (Ephesians 5:4); and St. James said that to be purified men ought to "Be afflicted and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up" (James 4:9). In the Bible, arguably a primary source in the Middle Ages of behavioural models, laughter is seen as incompatible with righteous enlightenment, and accordingly given even less sanction than in the ancient philosophies and courtesy guides.

Not surprisingly, medieval saints' laughter is taken as a sign of spiritual joy and spiritual enlightenment. St. Brice's ironic laughter at the antics of a fiend and his charges is regarded as a mark of his great holiness and superior comprehension of the divine. At a mass conducted by St. Martin of Tours:

Brice toke up a gret laughinge, and seint Martin per-seiued it...asked him whi he laughed, and [Brice] answered, that he saw the fende write all the laughinges that were between the women atte the masse, and it hap-ped that the parchemyn that he wrote in was shorte, and he plucked hard to haue made it lengger with his tethe, and it scaped oute his mouthe, and hys hede had a grete stroke ayenst the fall, "& that made me to laughe!"⁷⁰

St. Martin, suitably impressed, cautions against women's "jangling" at holy service. In contrast to this is the laughter and joking wit of the vicious and the damned, perhaps best exemplified by characters from the mystery cycles and morality dramas. Comic characters, such as Cain, Noah and Noria, Mak, the soldiers executing Christ on Golgotha, and various fiends and vice-figures such as Mankind's Tytivillus,

70. The Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry, ed. Thomas Wright, EETS O.S. 33, (London: 1868), 42.

display humour which invariably and ironically reveals their spiritual darkness or moral despair. Their wit and comic antics unmask, if not incomplete or corrupt understanding (like St. Joseph's suspicion of Mary), conscious depravity and wilfulness toward God.⁷¹ On the other hand, the righteous never reveal any sense of humour in the cycle plays but remain suitably serious; nevertheless, they do experience occasionally a joyous catharsis, delight in divine understanding.

Other examples of saints' laughter, perhaps less amusing in themselves than the anecdote concerning St. Brice, usually indicate an awareness of and adherence to St. James' admonitions in regard to suffering for God. St. Dunstan laughs at the shame and unjust sentence of exile imposed upon him by King Edwyne;⁷² or St. Bridget, about to be martyred, answers an officious archbishop's steward:

Than sche, knelyng down, receyued his blissing & toke
 hir leue with ryth glad cher, goyng owt of hys chambyr.
 And þe Erchebisshopys mene preyd hir to prey for hem,
 but þe styward was wroth, for sche lowgh & made good
 cher, seying to hir, "Holy folke xulde not lawghe."
 Sche sayd, "Ser, I haue gret cawse for to lawghe, for
 the more schame I suffyr & despite, þe meryar may I ben
 in our Lord Ihesu Christ."⁷³

Again we see the common expectation of devout behaviour: "Holy folk should not laugh." It was good to be despised for God, but better still to be martyred. For those saints of St. Lucy's character, dying

71. This irrereligious laughter of the vicious or ignorant characters in Church drama is a special case of medieval laughter, differing radically from fabliau-derived humorous laughter. It is concerned with damnation and error, to the exclusion of interpersonal folly and sexual misalliances; the laughter it elicits is much more consciously didactic.

72. Early South English Legendary, Laud MS. 108, ed. Carl Horstmann, EETS O.S. 87, (London: 1887), 21.

73. The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Sanford Brown Meech, EETS O.S. 212, (London & Oxford: 1940), 135.

"Than vmthynk þe how mot I lagh when þer er grete festis made afore me, þat seis behynd me þe bitternes of my sin? And befor me I se ane vncertantie of þat at is to com, and on my lefte hand I see vexacions of present aduersities, and on my right hand I se noyes þat commys after prosperities. And all þies I se as sharp swerdis of the sentans of allmyghti God. And I se dead hyng a-blown, whame I wate nevr what howr will stryke me, and vnderne the me I se þe pitt of hell at I am ferd at fall into, & within me I se myne awn freletie. And emang all þies I am sett in a frele seatt, oute of þe whilk I am ferde daylie to fall. And þerfor hafe þou no mervell if I may not fynd in my hart to lagh."⁷⁶

He makes his case very effectively, but of course the example of this king is perfect for wisdom literature--a man of extreme spiritual consciousness--and so an admonition rather than a model of real-life behaviour. He is "estraunged in company," and though his morbid sobriety may be accounted politically and eschatologically proper and wise, according to what we have seen earlier in his grossly excessive sobriety his bearing would not be accounted courteous, nor probably very healthy. Erring perhaps on the side of excess, his behaviour would be rather the exception than the rule.

It may have been better for the devout to weep in a charnel house than take any delight in the world,⁷⁷ but it was also understood that not everyone could be a saint, however desirable. Everyman could not reasonably expect beatitude, only to live as righteously as possible, continually struggling between the ascetic demands of saintliness and the moral depravity of lapsing unchecked into earthly temptations. If the medieval period was an age of exceeding piety, it was also an age which, guided by classical models, valued moderation--if only because

76. Ibid., 459. Also cited in Jacob's Well, ed. Arthur Brandeis, EETS O.S. 115, (London & Oxford: 1900), 220-22.

77. Mirk's Festial, ed. T. Erbe, EETS E.S. 96, (London: 1905), 63-64.

moderation was so seldom achieved. I have already noted the medieval philosophers' recognition of laughter as a human property, and contemporary theologians' expectations that it was too human a property. There was general acceptance of laughter as a good and unique human activity, and the "golden mean" in indulging it was encouraged as courtesy. In a spiritual context as well moderate and properly motivated laughter could be accepted, even among "holy folk." As Aristotle and Aquinas had argued, laughter could be valuable as recreation, preparatory to virtue and serious things. Again from the Alphabet of Tales, a story is told of St. Anton, who urges an occasional relaxation of spiritual tension lest the spirit break, drawing on the image of the taut bowstring:

We rede in þe life of saynt Anton how on a tyme ane archer, þat was a gude shoter, fand saynt Anton syt- tand emang his brethir makand merie with þaim. And þis archer was displesid þerwith & þoght þai sulde hafe bene in þer clostre, & tente þer bukis & þer serues, & nott hafe bene att no sporte nor no welefare. And onone Saynt Anton perseyvyd his menyng, and callid hym to hym, & bad hym putt ane of his arows in his bow, & shote als fer as he myght, & he did so; and þan bad hym take a noder...& draw hys bow as fer as he myght, at it mott fle far fro hym. And þan þis archer ansswerd hym agayn, "Sir, I dar nott, for I may happen draw so fer þat I may breke my bow, & þat wold I nott, for þan I monde make mekull sorow." Than Saynt Anton sayd vnto hym agayne, "loo! son, þus it is in þe werke of allmy- ghtye God; for and we draw it out of mesure, we may sone breke itt; þat is to say, and we hadde our brethir so straye in aw þatt þai com to no myrth nor no sporte, we may lightlie cauce þaim to breke þer ordur. And ther- for vs muste som tyme powse our pithe, & suffre þaim hafe som recreation & disporte emange all þer other char- gis, as Caton says, Interpone tuis interum gaudia curis."⁷⁸

Once more we note the common expectation, marking "holy folk" from their ordinary neighbours, is that they should not laugh and make merry. But in practice the occasional relaxation of "aw," such as

78. An Alphabet of Tales, pp. 5-6.

St. Anton argues for, is permitted. The 10th degree of humility in the Rule of St. Benedict similarly allows for moderate laughter.

Robert Henryson, among other moralists, recognized the value of imparting serious matter in a light context, and also uses the bow-string image to introduce his "translatioun" of some Aesopic and Reynardian fables:⁷⁹

ane Bow that is ay bent
Worthis unsmart and dullis on the string;
Sa dois the mynd that is ay diligent
In ernistfull thoctis and in studying:
With sad materis sum merines to ming
Accordis weill: thus Esope said, I wis,
Dulcius arident seria picta iocis.

(22-28)

Fabulists and other storytellers usually reverse this admixture, and with mirthful matters mingled some seriousness. Nevertheless, the fact remains that a high proportion of extant English humorous verse-stories at least make some attempt, however fleeting or inapplicable, to offer a moralitas or append a moral lesson for the instruction of an audience, thus "legitimizing" their efforts to entertain under the principle Henryson has here put into verse.⁸⁰ In this the comic poets adhere to an unwritten but all-pervasive attitude fostered by the Church, that laughter ought to be a manifestation of spiritual joy, revealed wisdom, or alternatively, a by-product of some other worthwhile activity. Otherwise, mirth and humour open a strong potentiality to sinfulness.

Henryson's defence, as is typical of medieval writers, is based on past authority, of which the St. Anton-story provides an exemplary illustration. The seria-ludicra pairing, earnest and game, was long established in literary theory. Fabula, as opposed to historia ("nar-

79. Henryson, p. 4.

80. Didacticism in English fabliaux is discussed more fully in Chapter Three, pp. 189-92.

ratio rei gestae," or factual reports), was generally taken by thinkers such as Isidore of Seville to mean beast fables, myths, (Roman) comedies, and "everything that is 'mere invention'."⁸¹ Because such entertaining stories were "lies" to begin with (fallax et mendax), had associations with pagan cultures,⁸² and could be seen as producing effects (laughter, sensual delight) which had perilous spiritual associations, they sometimes had to be defended. This was done in a widely accepted argument that rendered fabula tolerably useful but not important, of low moral value--relaxing the mind and so preparing it for virtuous pursuits--but essentially of no spiritual harm. In part, the ideas sprang from Horace's "hedonistic," entertainment-oriented defence of poetry, that it had a plurality of aims: docere, movere, and delectare.⁸³ That certain literary products could be legitimately

81. Curtius, op. cit., 452. See Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae, I, 40: "Fabulas poetae quasdam delectandi causa fixerunt, quasdam ad naturam rerum, nonnullas ad mores hominum interpretati sunt." Curtius goes on to explain, in regard to Quintillian's accepted recommendations for studying poets like Virgil and Horace: "The erotic elegy is altogether rejected. Comedy, on the other hand, is recommended. It is important for students of oratory because it presents various characters and passions, which Aristotle too had treated in his Rhetoric. This remark on comedy can explain the fact--at first sight so surprising--that Terence was one of the favorite school authors of the Middle Ages." G.R. Owst, Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England, 2nd ed., (Oxford: 1961), 152, also notes that there was no clear distinction in the terms narratio, fabula, and figura.

82. Stephen Manning, "The Nun's Priest's Morality and the Medieval Attitude Toward Fables," JEGP, 59 (1960), 403-416, cites an objection of Aquinas to poetry: "Sed poetae non solum in hoc sed in multis aliis mentiuntur, sicut dicitur in proverbio vulgari." A basic objection was that poetry and stories of the pagan gods were inseparable; this was also true of sermon literature, accused of "trafficking in demons": see Owst, op. cit., 179-80.

83. Curtius, op. cit., 478-79. Horace declared that poetry was an entertaining game, a delight, distinguishing it from a medium in which to teach geography, history, and other factual subjects.

classed as delectari became a widespread notion in medieval literary criticism, as Glending Olson has ably shown.⁸⁴ Olson points out that St. Augustine regarded entertaining fictions as not important but not evil; Macrobius acknowledged "that one type of fabula has no moral purpose" but simply aims to entertain; Dominicus Gundissalinus's 12th century treatise De Divisione philosophiae cites Horace's mixture of pleasure and profit, but defined the two separately, "poetry entertains or instructs"; Hugh of St. Victor defined scientia ludorum among the seven mechanical arts, a refreshment and concession to man's frailty as opposed to the serious seven liberal arts, pleasing the ears but not the soul, while theatre for Bonaventura was the lowest of the four lights of God helping to supply man's bodily needs (in this case delight); the Disticha Catonis advocates mixing pleasure with seriousness; and so on. Olson concludes that there existed "a legitimate justification for certain works of art which do not seek to profit one's soul."⁸⁵ Though trifling and not of serious import, entertaining stories such as fabliaux, and the laughter they sought, could and did claim an acceptable position as recreation. Corresponding to their low value, style ("modo loquendo") and theme ("materia") ought to be suitably low and rhetorically plain.⁸⁶

It is difficult to assess with any precision just how greatly the

84. Glending Olson, "The Medieval Theory of Literature for Refreshment," op. cit., 295.

85. Ibid., 293-313.

86. Curtius, op. cit., 357, quoting Dante. G. Olson, op. cit., 296, cites Geoffrey of Vinsauf to the same effect. Notice that Henryson's Prologue (Morall Fabillis, lines 36-42) goes on to register the proper stylistic level: not "deminute or 3it superfluous," but "in hamelie language and in termes rude."

demands of religious scrupulousness, courtesy, and moral exempla affected the actual behaviour of secular Everyman, who seems, if we may judge from the archbishop's steward or the archer, to regard laughter as normal in ordinary people but unseemly in the saintly. There may have been a large number of people, like the king who never laughed, who held always in mind their fate in the next world and so guarded their thoughts and deeds accordingly. But, allowing for folk of the exemplary king's disposition and spates of fanatic religious devotion in all men, I think the majority of people laughed widely, frequently, and on the whole without remorse. Moralists and Church doctrines made no absolutely firm stand regarding laughter, and courtesy writers issued recommendations instead of edicts. It would have been impossible and undesirable had moralists wished to regulate laughter, considering human nature even as it was understood then. Poets, song writers, minstrels, and others who depended upon entertaining for their livelihoods could not have flourished to the extent they did.

Literary works themselves provide some clue as to the kind and frequency of laughter in medieval life. Chaucer, for example, an English poet in touch with Continental traditions, may be taken as a representative secular writer. Looking in his canon for instances of laughter we find recorded all varieties of laughter, with different types of scornful laughter dominating. There is "good" laughter, like the laughter associated with the "kiss of peace" (C.PardT.967), the "courtesy" of laughing at evil (Rom.2293), Pandarus' selfless joy at Troilus and Criseyde's union (TC.iii.199), Christian laughter at holy incongruities and the scorn of their infidel enemies (G.SecNT.462; 506), and laughter as an endearing female attribute in romance love (BD.849; Rom.2808-19). There is even what we might call morally "neutral" laughter: the Orient's "laughter" at sunrise in the Knight's tale

(A.KnT.1494); the Host's pleased laughter in appreciation of the Knight's opening story (A.MilT.3114); the pilgrim's general laughter at the Miller's ribaldry (A.MilT.3855-58); and Criseyde's jocularly in the company of her comic uncle Pandarus (TC.ii.99, 1108, 1163-69, 1593; iii.561, 613)--whose mirth, incidentally, turns ashen when she suffers love-sickness (TC.v.781).

But much of the laughter depicted is either "bad" or scornful. Bad laughter includes the Jews laughing at Christ's death (C.Part.467); the Wife of Bath's laughter (A.GenPro.474), like the harlot's laugh (Rom.5061) or the dishonest wife's laughter at talk of lechery (Rom.4258), implying her lasciviousness; the mirth of Madness, laughing in rage (A.KnT.2011); and the embarrassed laughter of the Friar at his own lewd thoughts (B.²ShipT.1300), whose playful laughter with the merchant's wife is contrasted with the merchant's "wrooth" (B.²ShipT.1612). In Chaucer's characters, however, the laughter of scorn crops up with the greatest consistency, ranging from Troilus' proper scorn of earthly affairs from the vantage of the ogdoad (TC.v.1821) to the cruelly scornful laughter of Venus (E.MerchT.1723), or especially of Fortuna (Bo.II.i.290-95; TC.iv.7; B.MkT.3740), at victimized devotees. Many of the characters laugh at each others' ridiculousness, as Alison titters and Nicolas guffaws at Absalom's disgrace (A.MilT.3722-25) and the folk of Oxford laugh at the lovers and especially at John the Carpenter's "madness" (A.MilT.3840-49) when their antics are uncovered. So the Wife of Bath laughs at her older bedmates' love-labours (D.WBT.201) and her mocking fifth husband chuckles at his misogynistic book (D.WBT.672), the Friar laughs at the Wife's lengthy preamble (D.WBT.829) and the Summoner (D.WBT.849), and all the pilgrims laugh at the fraudulent Pardoner (C.PardT.961); the birds at their parliament laugh

at the goose's folly (PF.575), and Aeneas at Dido's woes (LGW.1251-52). Chaucer never makes any judgments upon laughter per se, and even his ultra-conservative Parson touches on laughter only rarely, almost incidentally, warning about the least venial sin associated with Ire, the idle tongue, the jangling of which causes men to laugh like apes (H.Parst.650-55). Characteristically, Chaucer does not pass editorial judgment on the moral quality of laughter or the laughers from whom it issues. Any assessment of the positive or negative quality of laughter--and all types occur with regularity in Chaucer's writings--must be imposed from the outside by readers, inferred from general knowledge, context, and what we know about the characters.

Contextual usage of laughter in Middle Scots literature confirms the general pattern observable in Chaucer's canon. That is, laughter of all kinds is recorded, with scornful laughter seeming to dominate. Entries in the DOST document all varieties of laughter: joy, amusement, astonishment, pleasure; laughter in a friendly and affectionate manner upon someone; laughter at something or someone in amusement or mockery (humour); or laughter deriding a person or thing, "laughing to scorn," to follow the dictionary's major divisions. Given human nature, we should expect this broad spectrum, for these entries represent life in general and are not restricted to literary writings.

The literary productions themselves provide more useful information. Nineteen of the humorous poems under present discussion use the word "laugh" or "smile" (smiling, that is, as an indication of pleasure). A survey of contextual usage of laughter in these poems indicates that, with few exceptions,⁸⁷ there are three basic kinds of lit-

87. Exceptions include the laughter of joy when Henryson's two mice are reunited (Morall Fabillis, 192); the ironic use of "laughing" in the description of the Gyre Carling's "lawchand lippis" ("The

erary laughter: the laughter of folly; the laughter of moral turpitude; and the laughter of ridicule.

The laughter of folly appears, as expected, in the mouths of ridiculous characters: for example, the coquettish "Te he!" of Jenny and similar female giggle in a Dunbar chanson d'aventure ("The Wowing of Iok and Iynny," 13; "In Secreit Place This Hyndir Nicht," 22); when the king in The Thre Prestis of Peblis' second tale smiles at an insult Fictus levels at him (485); or when the cock and the wolf variously in Henryson's Morall Fabillis chuckle vacantly as they are taken in by the fox's confidence tricks (446; 684). Such laughter, making the characters seem more ridiculous, represents a foolish gesture by a character who is ignorant or otherwise lacking in understanding.

The laughter of depravity occurs in characters involved in wrongdoing. In The Freiris of Berwik, for instance, Alesone "smylit woundir lustely" (167) at the advent of her lover Abbot Johine under her clothing, and, not surprisingly, thereafter they go on to great game and sport. Sym declares his satisfaction in selling bogus religious relics, "I schrew þame þat ay leiss but lauchter" ("Sym and His Bruder," 44); it occurs when the Gyre Carling "luche and lut fart / North berwik law" after striking a delighted blow at love-smitten Blasour ("The Gyre Carling," 13-14); or, most commonly, when Henryson's fox chuckles evilly to himself as he plans or executes some trick upon another (Morall Fabillis 2187, 2248, 2329, 2345, 2382). This vicious laughter may be seen, in ethical terms, as a variant of foolish laughter, revealing insufficient understanding; and, saving Alesone's wicked

Gyre Carling," 6), soon to be equated with her anal orifice in the parallelism of line 13; and God's delight when Kittok sneaks into Heaven ("The Ballad of Kynd Kittok," 21)--but this again can be seen as mocking the futile efforts of St. Peter to police the gate.

smile, all of these instances may be considered varieties of scornful or mocking laughter aimed at the victims. Depraved laughter stands halfway between folly and scorn.

Finally, the third category of contextual laughter, by far the largest, is the derisive laughter of scorn and ridicule. Characters are often found laughing one another to scorn: Fictus laughs at the king's unwitting acceptance of his insult (Thre Prestis of Peblis, 488); Henryson's Parliament of Beasts laugh and joke at the expense of the mare-duped wolf,⁸⁸ or another wolf fears a disguised wether made a mockery of him (Morall Fabillis 1054-67; 2556), or Makyne laughs at Robene's belated love-sickness (Robene and Makyne, 123); Dunbar's devils laugh at the torment of the damned as later the poet laughs at the inept antics of the sowtar and tailor jousting in Hell (Fasternis Evin in Hell, 26-29, 222), or Dunbar overhears a widow and two companions laugh derisively at the tales told on their husbands (The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo, 47, 240, 417, 506); and the townsfolk of Peebles ridicule their country neighbours as the rustics laugh at each other in Peblis to the Play (86, 104-106, 206). This is not, admittedly, a comprehensive survey of all Middle Scots literature. But laughter appears in a high percentage of the humorous narratives, and when it does appear, significantly, instances of scorn and ridicule clearly comprise the bulk of usage. This would tend to

88. Compare the advice in "The Foly of Fulys and the Thewis of Wysmen," in Ratis Raving, op. cit., 55:

Nocht loud of lauchtyr amang men,
 Thar smylyng scantly may men ken
 bot syk a bourd may quhilum fall
 That al mon lauch, baith gret & small.
 (103-106)

Even granting a degree of public fun, Henryson's animals' laughter is mocking and excessive, and so morally suspect.

bear out the general assertion that the laughter of superiority dominates in medieval literary productions.

Laughter, then, was abundant and even justifiable, although it constituted a moral issue throughout the Middle Ages. Courtesy stressed the social utility, and the Church the spiritual effects, of laughter: both designated boundaries of "proper" laughter and deplored the evils of uncontrolled mirth; and both recommended care and moderation in the indulgence of humour in ordinary life. There were degrees and situations in which laughter was wholly inappropriate; and, despite the proven variety and frequency of laughter, it would be unwise to discount the influence of moral thinking in regard to literary laughter. Nevertheless, given the defensibility of laughter on merely recreational grounds as well as more weighty considerations, we may say the telling of bours, jests, and humorous stories was sanctioned, constituting a condition in which a partial suspension of moral restraints was acceptable. Without overstepping the bounds of taboo,⁸⁹ humorous verse stories sought to raise unchecked laughter and jollity in an audience, indulged by an amused upper class and rather earthier Church. Under the spell of conventional fictions people were allowed to put by spiritual concerns and small worries about propriety at least for the time it took to hear a story out, much as today we have no qualms about laughing at someone who would normally deserve our pity, so long as we recognize the artifice. A poet could justify his writing, as did the author of The Colkelbie Sow,⁹⁰ simply by saying his

89. Tales may be frankly sexual--usually suggestive but at times direct--and indecent, but may not laugh "up" at authority or seed revolutionary dissatisfaction

90. Cf. also G. Olson, op. cit., 307-309, documenting similar claims made by French fabliauds when justifying their work: to delight and refresh.

intention was to give pleasure to a company and provide it recreation:

Quhat is þe world without plesance or play
 Bot passional / Than lat ws mak sum sport
 and recreatioun the cumpany to confort

.

Quhairfoir I will say of my fantasy
 Sum solacing to glaid this cumpany.

(18-20; 47-48)

Of course, to have poetic works accounted of greater moral value a poet had to provide a reader profit, sentence, as well as pleasure, solatium. Henryson, in the Prologue to his Morall Fabillis (1-28), expertly devises just such a defence of his labours in the fabula vineyard; and we are expected to account these and like productions supplying both pleasure and profit as, morally, among the most valuable works of which fiction is capable. Other fabliards were content merely to teach one simple lesson, or at least seem to teach a lesson by introducing the catch-phrase "By this example men may see..." or some variant. Laughter was acceptable in all literary genres, in comic works of all kinds; in romances (especially where women were concerned, with tests of fidelity, sometimes absurd or sometimes ironic, as in scenes between Gawain and Bercilak's wife in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; or in connection with love, as when Chaucer's Troilus faints with ecstasy and has to be thrown by Pandarus into Criseyde's bed, TC.iii.1095-99); Latin epics; and even sermons⁹¹ and stories of saint's lives: some comic miracles of St. Martin, for example, who plays paralytic tricks on threatening heathens or pesters the devils sent to torment him.⁹² To varying degrees of emphasis,

91. Owst, op. cit., 163-67, documents the use of fable material, anecdotes, facetiae, and other humorous stories in sermon and homiletic literature.

92. Curtius, op. cit., 428-29; he points out that it was common to find saints comically confounding evil and reducing devils, pagans,

entertaining interludes were expected in all types of medieval literature. Whether frowned on by moral authorities or gladly tolerated--and, except for obvious reasons in medieval drama put on under the Church's supervision, there is little to suggest censorship or attempted suppression--humorous verse narratives' main object was to entertain, and they were widespread throughout Europe and continued in popularity for generations.

and wicked folk to the fools they are ad absurdum, adding: "Humoristic elements, then, are a part of the style of the medieval vita sancti. They were present in the material itself, but we may be sure that the public expected them as well. Now exactly the same thing is true of secular narrative poetry."

PART II: STORIES

Chapter Two

ROBERT HENRYSON

"What boots it sweart the Fox?"

Robert Henryson (?1430-?1500) is among the first and foremost of the Middle Scots poets, a brilliant narrative artist whose reputation, curiously, has grown from near total obscurity in the last three centuries to pre-eminence among the Middle Scots makars in this. In discussing his humorous verse narratives I shall principally be concerned with his Morall Fabillis.¹ Each of his thirteen animal fables which

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1. Quotations and line numberings refer to The Poems of Robert Henryson, ed. Denton Fox, (Oxford: 1981). Morall Fabillis is the short form of the title Morall Fabillis of Esope the Phrygian, a device of the bookseller Thomas Bassandyne, whose edition of the poems in 1571 represents the most complete and correct early copy of them in print. His edition was published almost one century after the presumed dates of composition, 1470-95; and his title is of course specious, as Henryson believed Aesop to be a Roman, not a "Phrygian." Yet I employ Bassandyne's title, because "Morall" Fabillis accurately conveys the earnest moral purpose, the satiric atmosphere, of the collection. Fox, following G. Gregory Smith, styles them simply Fables, rejecting Bassandyne's obvious invention. However, as Fox accepts Bannatyne's title for Orpheus and Eurydice, among other "traditional" denominations for various of Henryson's poems, I see no need to follow him in this. Fox bases the substantive text of his edition on Bassandyne, and, using highly speculative evidence, even argues that the order of the fables as arranged in the Bassandyne print must be Henryson's original design (Introduction, lxxv-lxxxix). All textual sources, in manuscript or print, show suffering in transcription, notably with Protestant alterations in addition to the usual wide variety of scribal and printers' errors. John MacQueen, Robert Henryson: A Study of the Major Narrative Poems, (Oxford: 1967), Appendix I "The Text of the Morall Fabillis," 189-99, suggests that the text which has suffered least from metrical corruption, haplography, dittography, difficilior lectio, and other corruptions of sense is the Bannatyne Manuscript, unfortunately incomplete. Though Fox essentially rejects MacQueen's argument, nevertheless he draws heavily on Bannatyne for improved readings. The question of a reliable and authoritative text is a vexed and thorny one, to say the least, for no editor can hope to produce an entirely satisfactory reconstruction of Henryson's lost original. Despite my preference for Morall Fabillis, for convenience I refer to individual fables by their modern English titles.

have come down to us is satiric in intent. They are "serious" rather than "ridiculing" satires in the sense that they are aimed primarily at correcting vice and folly in others and only secondarily at exposing persons, institutions, and ideas to general ridicule. Five of these fables are also serious in tone; or, as in The Cock and the Jasp, seriously ironic when the tale and its moralitas are viewed together. The eight remaining fables are humorous in tone---those dealing with the fox and/or wolf (excepting The Wolf and the Lamb) and two of the mouse-fables, The Two Mice and The Paddock and the Mouse. These eight fables shall receive the greatest share of our attention.

Henryson's Morall Fabillis, then, is a collection of satiric beast fables which have been grouped, as far as we can be certain, by a printer; although there is no doubt some of the fables are related to each other, such as the trilogy of fox-fables beginning with The Cock and the Fox. The two basic medieval sources of animal fables that Henryson had available to him were those of the Aesopic tradition and the beast-epic tradition centering around the adventures of Reynard the Fox, the many branches of Le Roman de Renart. Both traditions were popular throughout the Middle Ages, and material from them was used in sermons and exempla, in the scholastic trivium, and in entertaining tales,² part of the ready stock of European knowledge.

Much of the best of recent Henryson scholarship has been devoted to finding out his specific sources and analogues for the Morall Fab-

2. On the use of fables in sermon literature see G.R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, 2nd ed., (Oxford: 1961), 152, 204-205, 241-57, 321-23, et passim; and John B. Friedman, "Henryson, The Friars, and the Confessio Renardi," JEGP, 66 (1967), 550-61. Aesop was continuously popular in the schools: see Ernst Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask, (New York: 1952), 49-50, 464-66.

illis. In general, Henryson relies on the Aesopic tradition as represented by the twelfth century Latin verse-Romulus of Gualterus Anglicus, the fables of Odo of Cheriton, the expanded French translations of Isopet I and Isopet de Lyon; and Latin and French Roman de Renart beast-epics.³ Cases can also be made for Henryson's acquaintance with Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale,⁴ Lydgate's Isopes Fabules,⁵ Caxton's translations of Reynard the Fox (1481) and Aesop (1484),⁶ and even oral sources such as sermons and folktales.⁷

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3. In addition to Fox (Introduction, xli-1), I depend here on MacQueen, op. cit., Appendices II and III; Anthony Jenkins, "Henryson's The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadgear Again," SSL, 4 no. 2 (Oct. 1966), 107-112; and especially I.W.A. Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson: A Study of the Uses of Source Material," (Unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1965), passim.
 4. Donald MacDonald, "Henryson and Chaucer: Cock and Fox," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, 8 no. 2 (Spring 1966), 451-61. The article draws attention to eight particulars in which Henryson's and Chaucer's Chantecleir-tales agree against all other extant texts.
 5. David K. Crowne, "A Date for the Composition of Henryson's Fables," JEGP, 61 (1962), 583-600, esp. pp. 588-91. Lydgate, however, also draws on Gualterus Anglicus: see H.N. McCracken, ed. John Lydgate: The Minor Poems, 2 vols., EETS E.S. 107 and O.S. 192, (Oxford: 1911-34; rpt. 1961), II, 566-74.
 6. Denton Fox, "Henryson and Caxton," JEGP, 67 (1968), 586-92, argues against Henryson's use of Caxton's translations on the grounds that "parallels between Henryson's Reynardian fables and Caxton's Reynard are neither striking nor extensive, and can be explained by the fact that both men are following the same tradition." R.D. S. Jack, "Caxton's Mirroure of the World and Henryson's 'Taill of the Cok and the Jasp'," The Chaucer Review, 13 no. 2 (Fall 1978), 157-65, has convincingly shown that the cock and the jewel episode in Chapter Five of Caxton's translation of The Mirroure of the World (1481) is the most likely source of Henryson's fable. If Henryson had read Caxton once, it follows he could have acquired other books from that press.
 7. See note 2, above; and Richard Bauman, "The Folktale and Oral Tradition in the Fables of Robert Henryson," Fabula, 6 no. 2 (1963), 108-24, a necessarily tenuous discussion. As the exact source of any given fable is not strictly relevant to my analyses, I shall leave aside the possibilities that Henryson may have drawn variously on Latin, French, or English sources.

Henryson himself gives us suggestions regarding the traditions he follows. In eight of the Morall Fabillis Henryson specifically mentions "Isope myne auctor" (162) or makes similar references to Aesop as his source (57, 1146, 1375, 1888, 2231, 2455, 2777). Of the remaining five fables, one, The Wolf and the Lamb, clearly belongs to the Aesopic tradition. The other four fables, The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger and the trilogy of fox-fables beginning with The Cock and the Fox, likewise do not mention Aesop but undoubtedly belong to the Roman de Renart tradition. This trilogy of fox-fables, which exhibits a cyclical pattern in that it covers two generations of miscreant foxes, in itself forms a miniature beast-epic; and The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger is thematically related to this trilogy of fables in that all four, to different effects, explore the homily that "falsheid fail3eis ay at þe latter end" (568; 1997). These four fables belong to the Reynardian tradition, and the other nine, according to Henryson's report, are Aesopic fables.

Henryson obviously did not find it incongruous to blend the two traditions together. Whatever the exact sources of his Morall Fabillis, he transformed them, individually and as a group, into new works. Fable literature, a continuously popular and growing genre from Greco-Roman times, consists of stories most usually involving animal characters which are adapted to illustrating a lesson in moral or prudent behaviour. In classical antiquity fables were regarded as an agreeable mode of illustrating a point or, especially, teaching infantile minds (such as children, peasants, or those otherwise uneducated); or as myths to please and frighten.⁸ They were used, referred to, or

8. See Donald A. Russell and Michael Winterbottom, eds. Ancient Literary Criticism, (Oxford: 1972), 303-304. See also Douglas Gray, Robert Henryson, (Leiden, The Netherlands: 1979), 33-63.

collected by such diverse writers as Hesiod, Aristophanes, Xenophon, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Plutarch, Phaedrus, and Babrius, among others.⁹ Fabulists largely demonstrated proper conduct in life. In pagan times, social virtues and common sense which made successful living easier were recommended. There could even be decidedly immoral precepts by Christian standards encouraged:

The virtues recommended by fabulists are chiefly the social virtues which make life comfortable and redound to the credit and interest of those who practice them--loyalty, gratitude, moderation, resignation, industry, and so on. Sometimes the lessons they teach are not really moral lessons at all, but merely counsels of prudence and worldly wisdom based on observation of people's behaviour and degenerating at times into frank immorality--how to get the better of an enemy (or even a friend), how to keep a whole skin by subservience to the possessions of power, how to profit by other men's misfortunes and mistakes, and in general how to turn everything to good account for oneself.¹⁰

Classical fables were occasionally employed as social satires (e.g. Aristotle's Rhetoric, II.20), but were more usually confined to practical precepts. The fables developed a moralitas section which came to be viewed as an essential element of the genre, either appended to or incorporated in each of the tales. Fables were regarded therefore as simple allegories, because they were stories in which literal actions illustrated higher truths.¹¹ This is a point to which I shall return.

In the sixth century A.D. Isidore of Seville, in defining fabula, generously and somewhat confusedly included "not only beast fables but

9. Russell and Winterbottom, op. cit., 510; and S.A. Handford, trans. The Fables of Aesop, (Harmondsworth, England: 1954), Introduction, xiii-xviii. I.W.A. Jamieson, "The Beast Tale in Middle Scots," Parergon, 2 (1972), 26-34, provides a useful summary of animal fable literature available to a fifteenth century writer.

10. Handford, op. cit., xx.

11. See John MacQueen, Allegory, (London: 1970), 9, 29, and 48.

also myths and comedies...everything that is 'mere invention'," as opposed to factual reports.¹² Yet Isidore reveals a Christian bias in interpreting fables. Fables in the Christian era, for example the fourth century A.D. collection of Avianus, were often adapted to or were composed to illustrate the proper conduct of a Christian life. The lessons were pointed toward the believers' spiritual benefits and posthumous fates. In addition to use by scholars and ecclesiastics in education and sermon literature, fables were an ideal medium for social and political satire, criticizing the behaviour of men under the guise of animals. The stock animal characters, as often seen in illuminated manuscripts, were regarded as miniature people, as "impish" children and "merry rustics"; and fables were used as satiric material, for example in the anti-mendicant tradition.¹³

The beast-epic was closely allied to the Aesopic fable tradition, and able to function in many of the same ways. It more directly mirrored contemporary society and was oriented toward a middle class audience. The beast epic, in concentrating largely on the clever adventures of Reynard the fox, reflected bourgeois interests and values much as the knightly epics revealed the tastes and concerns of the haut courtois. Reynard, a rather cynical fox, is not at the top of the animals' social hierarchy, yet he triumphs by virtue of his intellect. A moralitas could be applied to individual episodes, but moralitates were not an integral part of the beast-epic genre. The lessons

12. Curtius, op. cit., 452. He also refers to Isidore's note that "Fables tell of things which never happened and could never happen because they are contrary to nature," but that he goes on to allegorize a brief mythological description.

13. Owst, op. cit., 204-205, 321-23. For a fuller account of the anti-mendicant satiric tradition, see Chapter Three, pp. 198-203.

of the beast-epic, like fabliaux tending strongly toward satire of contemporary mores, usually emphasized themes of social relevance.

Henryson's use of the fable is both traditional and original. He unifies divergent strands, bringing together Aesopic and Reynardian fables--and their respective concerns--in one collection, reworking and especially expanding the tale and the moralitas-section alike. He uses fables as vehicles for pointed social satire, or to emphasize a Christian point of view regarding the conduct of life and mankind's true values, or both themes in conjunction with one another. In half of the fables, for example The Cock and the Jasp, The Two Mice, and the fox-trilogy, he is able to combine both social and spiritual themes in a rich satiric blend. As Ian Jamieson points out, "Henryson was the first to import explicitly into fable literature what was a theological commonplace: 'mony men in operatioun / Ar lyk to beistis in pair conditioun'."¹⁴ Henryson, occasionally and with apparent deliberation, ironically contrasts his moral lesson with the tale it accompanies (e.g. The Cock and the the Jasp, The Wolf and the Wether). In examining man as a beast relative to the next world he has created from simple models a very complex poetry requiring a highly sophisticated audience.¹⁵ Henryson's most original contribution to the genre lies primarily in his broadening of the fables' scope from envisioning rather limited ethical precepts to encompassing the whole of moral life in a Christian universe, and concurrently his emphasis on the story-teller's art.

14. Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson," op. cit., 36. Jamieson cites 2 Peter 2:9-10, Boethius' De Consolatione, III prosa 8, and The Cloud of Unknowing (EETS, pp. 118-19), as sources of the philosophical and theological background for this concept.

15. Ibid., 287.

Before an examination of the fables, however, I think it useful first to look at Henryson's only other comic tale, Robene and Makyne, for it represents in miniature Henryson's techniques as a narrative humorist. These techniques are common to his art as a fabulist. Here as with many of his works Henryson has skilfully adapted a traditional form (in this instance the French pastourelle) to his own ends and made the material truly his own, infusing it with a vitality and freshness that gives it the impression of originality.

Robene and Makyne, in eight line, heavily alliterative octosyllabic ballad stanzas, is pastoral in setting. But Henryson's concern is with the human, and details of scene are few and incidentally introduced. Robene sits "on a gud grene hill" (1) minding his sheep, which he points out to Makyne ("Lo quhair they raik on raw," 12). We learn of the setting and summery season ("the nicht is soft and dry, / The wedder is warme and fair, / And the grene woid rycht neir us by," 97-99) only as Robene tries to urge Makyne on to a night of love-making; and both depart from each other in opposed emotional states "Amangis the holtis hair" (128), the now-bleak landscape reflecting Robene's blasted love-suit. Details of time and place are drawn in periodically as required by the narrative. Henryson indulges in no scene description for the sheer pleasure of it, but only provides it in relation to some other element of the story. He focusses on his characters, though even then we are given no hint of their physical appearance (Makyne is simply styled "mirry," 3, a curious appellation, as at this stage she enters in despair of love); instead we are pointed to their emotional conditions ("Robene on his wayis went / Als licht as leif of tre," 65-66), which are plotted in detail, progressions from weal to woe and vice versa. Makyne's merriness then is neatly charted through

the poem, coming as a surprise revelation at the end of it. Henryson concentrates on dialogue, character in action. Most of the tale is taken up with concise and energetic dialogue which consists to a large degree in a debate on the rules and nature of love. This element of comically earnest disputatio is a major narrative device that Henryson employs repeatedly.

Henryson neither describes Robene or Makyne¹⁶ nor interjects any editorial commentary about them. By simply reporting their speeches and actions Henryson manages to appear not to take sides, presenting both to greater or less degrees sympathetically, and so maintains a comic balance as their fortunes become inverted. Both are afflicted successively with love-sickness ("sum pairte of Mawkynis ail / Out-throw his hairt coud creip," 77-78), with love considered a madness, a derangement of normal senses ("quhat hes marrit the in thy mude?" 13). But the story leads us to laugh at Robene's double folly--he is wanting intellectually and so a ridiculous character--and not at Makyne's initial condition, for she seems to be a true devotee of love's mysteries, wise in its ways (17-24) and long-suffering in its cause (5-6).¹⁷ Her anguish at rejection is real and pitiable pain ("Now

16. I.W.A. Jamieson, "The Minor Poems of Robert Henryson," SSL, 9 nos. 2-3 (Oct.-Jan. 1971-72), 125-47, shows that the name Makyne in Scots later came to be used as a popular synonym for slut or wanton, becoming by Lindsay's time a "name for the female pudendum" (p. 46). Henryson's use of the name, given the tale's content, could be a joking double entendre reference.

17. Cf. Makyne's formula for fine amour (17-24) with Pertelote's list in Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale, in Chaucer, B²4100-4107. Note also the ironic contexts of both, wherein the ideas on love are treated seriously: it is the kind of complex and highpowered ironic joke both poets relished. Roderick Lyall, "Narrative Technique and Moral Purpose in Middle Scots Poetry," (Unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Glasgow, 1979), 178, suggests that Makyne's position is so full of ironic contradictions as to make her "a witness of doubtful credibility." He cites her long practice of courtly love to no effect on Robene; her impatience des-

ma thow sing, for I am schent!" 71, an exaggeration both comic and pathetic under the circumstances). Many components of Robene and Makyne are common to the pastourelle genre: reversing the expected "boy-chases-girl" pattern, switching their positions--back to "normal"--at the unhappy end. Even their names, as we have seen, are typical of the pastourelle, as are open expressions of adult emotion, and debates on love.¹⁸ But with the introduction of terms from amour courtois and especially his sympathetic view of his characters Henryson has provided a radically different tone from his French models, gently comic and mildly ironic, eliciting the laughter of incongruity rather than superiority. Unlike numerous pastourelles, it is told in the third person instead of the first, precluding the narrator's knowing smirks or outside commentary; depending on his purposes, Henryson creates a narrator-persona and involves him to varying degrees (as hearsay reporter, direct witness, or participant) in the action of the Morall Fabillis. The dialogue is formally balanced, appropriate to their debate, yet handled with such skill as to give the impression of natural speech.

In this poem, as in the fables, Henryson's comic plot is built around incongruities of character and action. Robene and Makyne re-

pite counselling patience; and her "sexual preoccupation," an open sexual declaration which has the effect of alienating her.

18. Jamieson, "The Minor Poems of Robert Henryson," op. cit., 146, gives a fuller comparison of this poem with the French pastourelles, noting that love is "the sole preoccupation...very often unrequited love, that the refusal of a shepherd to love a maiden is a common starting point, that frank expression of emotion is common, that the 'débat' characteristic of argument and counter-argument is often used." See also his thesis, "Robert Henryson," op. cit., 294-300; Arthur K. Moore, The Secular Lyric in Middle English, (Lexington, Kentucky: 1951), 188-93; and Helen E. Sandison, The Chanson D'Aventure in Middle English, (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: 1913), 46-65, for further comparisons with the French genre.

verse their traditional roles as wooer and wooed. Makyne has suffered "lowd and still" a love-sickness for her swain for several years (4-7); further, she is, though merely a shepherdess, thoroughly conversant with the conventions of amour courtois, rules of love belonging to a class of society high above her station in life. This presents the doubly incongruous situation--a love-struck woman pursuing the man while functioning by rules not pertinent to her social class--as well as an ironic mixing of styles, the high style of romance literature with the lower style more usually appropriate to chanson d'aventure.¹⁹ Translating her passion into action, Makyne is willing to give up her maidenhead to Robene; that is, she is comically eager to endure the ultimate blow to a virgin's honour. Wooed Robene, conversely playing the virginal innocent, resists her protestations of love and alluring offers. While coyly interested to learn love's lore (14-16), Robene is unwilling to risk his reputation (32), and offers a variety of illogical objections to her pleas--he will lose his sheep (43), it is growing late (51-52), he should be home (59-60)--in a successful effort to protect his chastity. He never says directly that he does not love her, which would quell the affair instantly. Instead he raises objections which, in not actually denying her suit, serve to keep her hopes alive. His behaviour is coquettish, appropriate--indeed, common in amour courtois--to a flirting woman unwilling to commit herself for or against her suitor's love. When the emotional and physical situation reverses itself, resuming "boy-chases-girl" normality, Robene ironically demolishes his own prior objections--the sheep will need

19. Dr. Jamieson, citing The Harley Lyrics nos. 7, 8, 24, and 25, has kindly pointed out to me in correspondence that a mixing of styles was sometimes used and formed part of the pleasure of chanson d'aventure.

no minding overnight (87-88),²⁰ the night itself is propitious (97-98), they may securely hide away from love-quashing gossips (101-102)--only to be vigorously rejected at every turning by the woman who moments before had suffered for his love for years and had been eager to seduce him. He had sworn he desired no lovers (56), but incongruously ends assuring Makyne he abjures all other women and will devote himself to her alone (113-18), all to no avail. The action is neatly balanced, and the ironic pattern comes full circle: Robene begins blithe and womanless, Makyne unhappy and in love; Makyne woos Robene successfully; Robene, belatedly smitten, woos Makyne unsuccessfully; Makyne finishes blithely loverless, Robene unhappy and afflicted with desire. The plotting is brilliant, and our pleasure is sustained by the clever use of meter and the poem's form.

Henryson's theme as well becomes familiar in the Morall Fabillis, the variability of Fortune for those trusting in worldly felicity and stability, nicely dovetailing with the amour courtois notion of love's fickleness. A common image in late medieval poetry, the goddess of love and goddess of fortune figure as one being. On a simple level, the story's obvious "moral" is built into the tale in the proverb cited by Makyne: "The man that will nocht quhen he may / Sall haif nocht quhen he wald" (91-92). As far as it goes that message is psychologically appropriate, comic, and emotionally satisfying.

But Robene and Makyne can also be read as a sophisticated burlesque of the Adam and Eve legend, on a theme misquoted by Chaucer's Chauntecleer: "In principio mulier est hominis confusio." Robene, like Adam

20. The sheep--innocent and natural creatures contrasted with their guardians--become a comic leitmotif, repeatedly mentioned in ironically changing contexts.

in paradise, bides contentedly with his animals in a "natural" state. He is at peace and in harmony with his world until woman, Makyne, intrudes and offers a bite of the forbidden fruit ("And thow sall haif my hairt all haill, / Eik and my madinheid," 35-36). Robene protests guiltily that it is forbidden: though they are alone, his sheep, strangely conceived as gossips (almost regarded as careful and moral watchers over the garden), will discover their deed and "Thay wald ws bayth reproif" (32). He even repulses her as if she were the tempting serpent ("sum vthir man begyle," 63). The disquieting canker of love has infected his peace, however, and having "fallen"--literally into love-sickness, figuratively to temptation--Robene is plunged into a private hell because of a woman. Presumably his surroundings have not in fact changed, it is still a potential paradise on the heath; but his outlook has altered and he is left, like unredeemed man, "bayth wo and wrewche, / In dolour and in cair" (125-26). Depending upon the sophistication of the audience, the story easily accommodates the simple, literal interpretation of the action (Makyne's "moral") and the more complex, urbanely comic allegorical interpretation. The poet has an indulgent attitude toward human folly and the human condition which at the same time avoids being patronizing. He offers both the literal and allegorical interpretation comically and sympathetically, without being obtrusive with either. His methods, concerns, tone, and attitudes carry over into the Morall Fabillis.

i. Narrative

In Chapter One we explored the narrative nature of Robene and Makyne. Like it, each of the narratives that comprise the Morall Fabillis, whether humorous or serious in tone, are proper stories. The kinds of alterations Henryson has made to his original sources are additions,

additions of dialogue, of elaborated setting, of realistic detail, or of explanatory material. His changes are designed to enhance realism and, most significantly in terms of narrative, character-motivation. All of the plots grow out of choices made and actions taken by the animal agents in given circumstances; that is, as we expect of stories, the plots of each of the fables are character-determined. As stories, all of the Morall Fabillis exhibit unity and peripeteia, reversals which are frequently accompanied by anagnorisis.

Perhaps one fable, chosen at random, will serve to represent the whole collection: The Fox and the Wolf. Like The Preaching of the Swallow, it explores the theme of sudden death and damnation; but The Fox and the Wolf is comic, whereas the mood of The Preaching of the Swallow is tragic. Its action is initiated by the fox's intimations of mortality and so the need to provide for his salvation. He makes a false-faithed act of contrition to the morally lax Freir Waitskaith, who imposes a negligible penance; yet, unable to comply even with minimal obligations, the fox steals and eats a goat, a deed which leads to his death at the goatherd's hands. The removal or transposition of any of its constituent parts would destroy the unity of the whole tale. The fable's peripeteia is also clear, for the fox's forewarning and attempt to secure salvation ironically result in the reversal of his fortune, death and damnation. This reversal is believable but, in the manner it transpires, unforeseen; and when it comes is accompanied by a recognition in the fox of the active part he played in contributing to his fall from grace: "Me think na man may speik ane word in play / Bot now on dayis in ernist it is tane" (770-71). The fable is further interesting as an example in that, rather unusually in the collection, it is an interwoven plot, deftly combining two separate

episodes--the confessio Renardi and the parodic "baptism" of the goat--into a complex new whole. The only other comic fable that is interwoven is The Trial of the Fox, in which the justice ay assembled by the lion is joined with the episode of the fox and wolf examining the exemption under the mare's hoof. The other fables are, if elaborate, simple plots, unified stories unfolding sequentially. Reversals of fortune are common to all of the Morall Fabillis; in fact, reference to images of Fortune are made explicit in such fables as The Two Mice (331), The Lion and the Mouse (1604), The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman (2418), The Wolf and the Wether (2588-2601), and The Paddock and the Mouse (2891). In several of the fables a double reversal of fortune occurs, so that as one character moves unexpectedly from felicity to misery another enjoys the opposite fate: for example, The Cock and the Fox; the fox and wolf in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadgear and The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman; and in The Wolf and the Wether. In The Paddock and the Mouse both creatures suffer an unexpected reversal when they are snatched to their death by the gled. In only one fable, The Lion and the Mouse, do both principal agents in turn enjoy happy reversals of bad fortune, escaping death.

The Morall Fabillis are peopled with distinctive, often engaging personalities; dialogue is full; and the agents' motives are usually straightforward. But there are a few plots with minor problems, problems which are related to character-motivation, a determining factor in plot-construction. Fables are by their very nature "unreal" and often literally silly, endowing animals with speech and reason. More than most genres of fiction, fables require an extra effort of will to suspend disbelief, even when we know the animals are meant to represent human characters and behavioural features under a satiric mask.

Fable animals ought to have clear motivation for their deeds--hunger, fear, greed--or the plot can break down. This occurs, for example, in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman. The wolf demands that the husbandman honour a careless oath and give him the foresworn team of oxen; yet we are asked to believe that the wolf willingly settles for a promised summer cheese in lieu of fat bullocks in hand. Similarly, in The Wolf and the Wether, the wether volunteers to pretend to be the dead sheepdog in order to protect the flock, and we are asked to accept that the shepherd welcomes this ridiculous idea as "gude wit" (2490). The list of such elements straining credulity could be extended: Chanticleir is not afraid of the poultry-thieving fox, mice take the opportunity to dance on the "dead" lion, and so on. Henryson is at pains to make the fox and the wether convincing, and to make the wolf and shepherd agree with their suggestions enthusiastically; and such acts effectively point up the wolf's gullibility and the shepherd's wit-deranging grief. But as we pause over their motivation, in order to unravel such justifications, we are in danger of breaking the fictive spell.

But fables are polysemous stories, and such slips in motivation are sometimes to be explained in terms of the allegorical interpretations given the story and the characters. That is, occasionally actions which are mystifying or ill-motivated on the literal level are comprehensible on a symbolic level. The cock, fearlessly harkening to the fox, is prideful man beguiled by the Devil's fair appearance and flattering words; the mouse, dancing disrespectfully on the body of the lion, represents the poorly governed commoner disdainful of the "slumbering" king; and so forth. We may describe this as allegorical motivation, and so account for the discrepancies between the literal

and symbolic meanings of an action.

The "good" mare's cruel behaviour in The Trial of the Fox is troubling in this regard: without provocation she deceives and severely injures a vain and ignorant cleric, the wolf. Insulting and defying the fox and wolf, the king's emissaries, she claims to have an exemption from compulsory parliamentary attendance hidden under her hoof, and invites them to read it for themselves. The fox contrives to put the wolf in harm's way by flattering him, making him "principall" of her message; and the wolf, "blindit with pryde," is kicked nearly to death for his pains (1003-22). Her trick is attended by comic elements: the wolf is deceived by both the mare and the fox, an unplanned conspiracy; the wolf suffers a comic reversal of expectations and avoidable injuries to his head and ego due to ignorant pride (he speaks haughtily, "in hy," 1014; and Henryson ironically understates the wolf's vulnerable position by remarking that despite his pride the wolf deigned "to luke doun law," 1021); and both the fox and mare comment on the wolf's folly with dry mockery. More broadly, Henryson's unique use of the hoof-trick in a political setting comments satirically on the nature of the legal profession's members. But the trick itself is not comic. We search the text in vain for a reasonable explanation of her deed. It is difficult to conceive why a morally positive agent like the contemplative mare should administer such a blow, for neither the fox nor wolf, though villainous predators, have done anything untoward to deserve it.²¹ Her action is surprising because seemingly unwarranted, incongruous but not funny. In the ab-

21. In analogous tales the wolf threatens the mare's foal, and she kicks him in self-defence. No such plausible motive is given in Henryson's version of the fable: see Jamieson, "Robert Henryson," op. cit., 213-17.

sence of a likely literal motive, her deed must be explained in terms of allegorical motivation. The wolf represents "sensualitie," and her hoof "the thocht of deid" (1118-25): thus, in symbolic terms, an otherwise inexplicable and rather savage trick becomes a reasonable and spiritually significant act redounding to the mare's credit.

The problem presented by allegorical motivation is more pronounced in The Paddock and the Mouse and especially The Cock and the Jasp. Toads may have certain diabolic associations in folklore, and a naturalist may know that some species of toads eat mice. But these facts and beliefs are not clarified in the tale: we are asked to believe that the paddock's otherwise unmotivated desire to trick and destroy the helpless mouse stems simply from a naturally evil disposition; and that there was some compelling need for the mouse literally to tie herself to the paddock. Only in light of the fable's moralitas, equating the mouse with man's soul and the paddock with the corrupting body, is their behaviour explicable. Devoid of the moralitas, the fable as it is given in effect would be meaningless. Yet even with baffling motivation, The Paddock and the Mouse would remain a story; they do make choices and take actions, actions which lead to an unexpected reversal of fortune.

The discrepancy between literal action and allegorical motivation is more acutely pronounced in The Cock and the Jasp. This fable hardly appears to be a tale at all, but rather a situational mimetic transcript, in that the whole action consists of a cock finding a jewel and soliloquising on it. Motivation is not wanting, for his thoughts are examined in depth. The cock praises but rejects the inedible jewel; yet this apparently reasonable act is accounted serious spiritual folly, and so constitutes an unexpected reversal of fortune,

a fall from grace. But this view is only possible in light of the moralitas, which ironically countermands the "expected" interpretation of the literal action. Without this moralitas--or with a lesson approving the cock's choice, as in Lydgate's version of the fable--The Cock and the Jasp would be a fantastic mimetic concentrating on the theme of the social hierarchy's correctness, and lacking a distinct peripeteia. Only when the tale is taken together with its moralitas can this fable be considered a story.

ii. Characterization

Characters are guided by literal and allegorical motivations; and characterization depends on a flexible blend of natural and symbolic qualities. In the opening stanzas of The Cock and the Fox Henryson outlines the literal nature of the characters in the Morall Fabillis:

Thocht brutal bestis be irrationall,
That is to say, wantand discretioun,
3it ilk ane in thair kyndis naturall
Hes mony diuers inclinatioun:
The bair busteous, the volf, the wylde lyoun,
The fox fenzeit, craftie, and cawtelows,
The dog to bark in nicht and keip the hows.

Sa different thay ar in properteis,
Vnknawin vnto man, and infinite,
In kynd hauand sa fell diuersiteis
My cunnyng it excedis for to dyte.

(397-407)

Fable agents, like the characters governed by "humours" in Jonsonian comedy,²² are comic "types," characters with certain traits fixed by

22. See Ben Jonson, Timber; or Discoveries, in The Complete Works of Ben Jonson, ed. C.H. Herford and E. Simpson, 11 vols., (Oxford: 1925-52), VIII, 640. He explains that poetry, especially Comedy, animates a variety of character-types: "some, insulting with Joy; others, fretting with Melancoly; raging with Anger; mad with Love; boiling with Avarice; undone with riot; tortur'd with expectation; consumed with Feare; no perturbation in common life, but the Orator findes an example of it in the Scene." Jonson also carries forward the medieval notion that fabula covered all poetic imitations (p. 645).

tradition if not by nature. Behaviour has to be "in character" with the animals' natures as specified in bestiaries and the Aesopic and beast-epic moulds developed over the centuries, enjoying a degree of freedom inside expected limitations. Real animals want "discretioun." They cannot make reasoned choices between right and wrong. Yet they do have natural "properteis." In the hierarchically arranged animal realm the "wyld" lion is king; the bear "busteous" (a host of meanings, but here probably "quarrelsome"); and the dog is a loyal domestic guardian--yet, when ironically used to symbolize the guardian turned against the vulnerable creatures in its care as in The Sheep and the Dog, capable of evil. The fox, as he demonstrates against Chantecleir, is an intelligent trickster, a creature of selfish cunning, of craft, guile, and hypocrisy. His socially dominant cousin the wolf, though not sketched here, is usually represented as a figure of pride, ill-tempered brute strength, and thick-wittedness. The single-epithet descriptions above suggest stereotyped characters throughout the animal kingdom.

Each creature's behaviour, his actions in the face of particular circumstances and moral choices, is shaped around a dominating characteristic. Obviously limited in one sense as personalities, all of the animals are prone to individual comic flaws: the lion is tyrannical (though often ineffective as governor); the cock and wolf are proud and gullible; the fox's conniving is sometimes overly ingenious and self-defeating; and helpless creatures, such as the mouse or the wether, over-extend themselves dangerously beyond their powers to save themselves. Yet, in general, most of these defects may be described in terms of comic ignorance--of the self, of others, of the nature of the world they inhabit, and of the nature of life, especially in re-

lation to the next world.

Coupled with comic ignorance in each of the animals is selfishness, which most often takes the form of appetite. Almost without exception the fables' plots involve (literal) appetite. The cock desires something edible in the midden (67); the fox hungers for chicken (423, 700, 2327), goat (746), fish (2192), or lamb (1047); the two mice desire bounteous viands (263-66, 2791-93); the wolf hungers for fish (2166), cheese (2399), or lamb (2702); and so on. Emphasis is laid on the lion's cruelty in The Lion and the Mouse (1511-14), but even the lion "held to hunt" (1510) for prey. Only in The Sheep and Dog is the sheep's flesh not literally in question but rather his wool. Yet even here appetite is transposed to the symbolic level in that the law court is staffed with predators and scavengers such as the raven, "Quha pykit had full mony scheipis ee" (1161). Their efforts to satisfy appetite can be comic; but the nature of the fable world is essentially cruel, because they prey on one another with varying degrees of success. This cruelty is reflected in the high instance of superiority laughter directed by the animal agents at one another, mirroring human society. With few exceptions (cf. 192, 446, 684), the various kinds of superiority laughter--depraved laughter at a victim, or scorn, or ridicule--prevail within the Morall Fabillis.

As comic "types," only one animal of a kind seems to exist among the larger creatures of the fable world at any given moment, functioning simultaneously on two distinct but interacting levels. In figurative terms, fable animals symbolize human beings, showing how "mony men in operatioun / Ar like to beistis in conditioun" (48-49). Henryson justifies this statement by further explaining in "The Prologue" that man reveals his bestiality in that he "Lufis ay carnall

and foull delyte" (51); he is governed by the various temptations of fleshly sensuality. Worse, man's condition of ungoverned "lust and appetyte" (53) is habitual, customary ("throw custum and the dayly ryte," 54)--so "radicate," that is, implanted, in ordinary behaviour that man no longer recognizes it as sin, a theme made specific later in two moralitates (cf. 782-83, 1107-08). Such appetitive behaviour may be normal and even acceptable in a beast, unendowed with reason or a soul and consequently in no fear of damnation, only death. In men, habitual and habitually unrecognized sin must have the profoundest tragic consequences. Henryson's primary concern is with man's behaviour as it reflects on his eternal fate, behaviour he seeks to correct through example. Literal appetite, reflecting ruling passions, operates conspicuously in all of the fables; and as the animals are symbolic men, capable of speech and reason, aware of law and social obligations, so their animal appetites must be viewed in symbolic terms, expressions of greed, pride, sensuality, and the other Seven Deadly Sins. As Henryson's satire is serious, the animals' comic flaws must also be regarded as spiritual failings. Wit, for example, is often an abuse of the heavenly grant of reason.

The characters are comic types, dominated by fixed if diverse "properteis"; but they are otherwise unlimited, and may be endowed with a variety of allegorical interpretations. Men may be "the feind" (the Carll, 1897), "deith" (the Cadgear, 2207), or "ane godlie man" (the Husbandman, 2434). The same kind of creature may carry opposing meanings in different contexts: the cock is a spiritual "fule" (142) or "nyse proud men, woid and vaneglorious" (591) on the one hand, and yet elsewhere hens may be "warkis" of "ferme faith" (2437). Or different animals may be variously given the same symbolic valuation:

mice and sheep are both at times equated with the "pure commounis" (1258, 1579, 2707). Usually, however, a character is assigned symbolic meanings which are consistent among themselves, and often consistent with the animals' literal natures. An evil creature like the fox, for example, is variously equated with "flatteraris" (601), "temptationis" (1132), the postlapsarian "warld" (2205--itself a symbol of false values and/or the vicissitudes of fortune), or "the feind" (2431). The wolf may be likened to "sensualitie" (1117), "ane wickit man" (2427), or three different kinds of predatory "fals extortioneris" (2711-62). Some characters may be interpreted in terms of obvious human equivalents, and at other times carry much broader and deeper associations: the lion, for example, may simply represent "Ane potestate...and gouvernour" in general (1575-76), or he may be seen more abstractly as "the warld" (1104). Potential varieties of meaning are virtually inexhaustible, with only one or two of several possible interpretations applied in any given moralitates. And, of course, allegorical interpretations are not confined to characters but may be applied to parts of animals, such as the mare's hoof ("thocht of deid," 1125), or inanimate objects, such as the jasp ("perfite prudence and cunning," 128). Symbolic meanings become part of the satiric method, surprising or even shocking the reader and so forcing him to reassess his own view of the action. The kind of interpretation presented depends on the kind or level of allegory the poet intends for us to consider.

There is then a constant interplay of levels of meaning, many different combinations of literal and symbolic motivations, and so actions, possible. That is, the natural animal world and its reflection of the human world (complete with king, parliament, clergy, judicial

officials, social conventions and regulatory laws) are intertwined in the Fabillis, for both satiric and incongruous comic effects. The wolf may be a real predator harassing a flock of sheep (The Wolf and the Wether); or he may assume a "wolfish," predatory human profession, such as a faithless mendicant friar (The Fox and the Wolf) or reiving manor lord (The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger). The fox might be a real barnyard raider (The Cock and the Fox), an imperfect Christian and impenitent thief (The Fox and the Wolf), a bondservent (The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger), or a secular lawyer and judge (The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman), occupations all satirically suited to the fox's guileful nature. Usually the characters carry both natural and symbolic meanings simultaneously.

Because Henryson plays back and forth between the natural and figural worlds, situations may be plainly absurd in naturalistic terms: the gelded ram, sewn into the dog's skin, attempts to catch a marauding wolf. In like manner, the wolf may be dressed as a friar, replete with cowl and prayer beads, and the "respectful" Catholic fox fall subserviently to his knees, throwing back his hood (669-75). Or the mouse, struggling with the paddock in the water, may cry out "for ane preist" in her extremity (2895). Occasionally the two modes overlap, as when the fox and wolf confront the husbandman to challenge his idle oath, and the litigants eventually swear obedience to the fox with a paw and a hand on the fox's tail (2313-14).

On the other hand, just as Henryson has the reader convinced that the characters are people inside animal skins, pretending to rational dignity,²³ he comically drops in a realistic detail that absurdly re-

23. Cf. Daniel M. Murtaugh, "Henryson's Animals," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, 14 no. 2 (Summer 1972), 405-21.

duces us again to the animal level: the fox complains that in trying to lift a heavy "nekhering" or a weighty summer cheese that he nearly pulled the tusks from his gums and the nails from his paws (2118, 2409). Or the town and country mice merrily sing "Haill, 3ule, haill" at their borrowed feast, only to be suddenly interrupted by the spenser--the scale instantly reverting to the human--and forced to scramble for safety (289-95). This fluid barrier between the two worlds reflects a dual aspect of the same incongruous effect. Both are ironic juxtapositions. On the figural level, animals behaving and living in a "human" world, thereby mirroring it, is a major device of satire. On the natural level, surprising reductions back to "realistic" animal details--used comically to call attention to the fiction and for minor ironic embellishments of the plot--serve to mock human pretension, showing that all creatures are intrinsically helpless, inadequate, or limited in the physical world.

The persona of the "I"-narrator functions similarly in dual worlds, a rhetorical mask which is an ironic device allowing Henryson an extra dimension of satiric freedom. At times he is a teller of tales who follows an authority, and whose point of view is outside and above the action. At other times he is a fictionalized creation witnessing and/or involving himself in the action at the animals' level. That is, the narrator himself can become an integrated, rather comic character in the fables. Like the Chaucerian narrator, he presents himself as somewhat naive and unworthy. He makes highly ironic use of the traditional humility topos: he claims to rely on an ancient authority, Aesop, and calls his own work merely "ane maner of translatioun" (33), disclaiming any skill in rhetoric in sustained passages of witty, metaphoric argument couched in a "superfluous," polysyllabic,

polished, Latinate "high" style.²⁴ He is in collusion with a sophisticated audience who sees through his joke. Yet, though asserting that he follows Aesop (43, 57, 61, 162, etc.), he separates himself from Aesop as the narrator,²⁵ and slides in and out of reliance on Aesop as his source. The "I"-narrator occasionally becomes a hearsay witness (e.g. The Two Mice, 357-58), or even a direct witness (e.g. The Preaching of the Swallow, 727-33). Concluding the improbable adventures of The Paddock and the Mouse, he throws over all authority and makes seriously ironic use of the traditional ending of impossibilia poems,²⁶ asserting: "Gif this be trew, speir 3e at thame that saw" (2909). Twice, as secondhand witness, he makes the curious statement that the fox himself supplied him with information ("as Lowerence leirnit me," 634 and 884-86). Perhaps an oblique reference to his source in the Reynard-cycle, such an assertion has the effect of making him a character periphally involved in the action.

Henryson varies his approach to "authority," playing back and forth between the human and animal worlds, as it suits his purposes. In the character of the narrator, he turns this ironic device to comic advantage. For example, he makes the narrator a moral guide in The

24. His translation is not made for personal glory ("for vane presumption") but at the request "of ane lord / Of quhome the name it neidis not record" (34-35). Critics have dismissed this as a sly sidestepping on Henryson's part of the accusation of presumption. But taking him at least partially in earnest, is it so naive to suggest the obvious: that the "lord" who is so well-known that he need not be named is the Lord, Christ? Henryson, in reproving "the haill misleving [of] man" and attaching often specifically Christian moral emphases, takes the preacher's part and does a preacher's work. It seems likely to me that Henryson has made a simple, if slightly tongue-in-cheek, dedication to his ultimate "maister," Christ, the Lord of Heaven.

25. This point is brought up by George Clark, "Henryson and Aesop: The Fable Transformed," ELH, 43 no. 1 (Spring 1976), 1-18.

26. Cf. line 20 of "I Yeid the Gate Wes Nevir Gane," Bannatyne, III, 66.

Fox and the Wolf. As the fox confesses to the wolf, the narrator makes a point of stepping discreetly aside:

Quhen I this saw, I drew ane lytill by,
For it effeiris nouthir to heir nor spy,
Nor to reueill thing said vnder that seill.
(694-96)

Although we can guess the nature of the fox's confession, it is not reported to us. When their dialogue resumes, the fox, with the wolf's insidious assistance, makes a mockery of the fulfilment of his penance and absolution. The narrator's correct and reverent attitude toward the sacrament of Confession contrasts ironically with the travesty made of it by the impenitent fox and apostate wolf.

The "I"-narrator, though only involved in the action as a mimetic witness, must be accounted a minor character in certain of the Morall Fabillis (cf. esp. the prologue to The Lion and the Mouse). Fables may be peopled with secondary as well as primary characters; in thematic terms, all agents in the comic fables are either ridiculous, ludicrous, or neutral, behaving in such a way that we regard the effects of their actions seriously, comically, as a mixture of both, or with relative emotional indifference. In The Two Mice, for example, the town mouse is ridiculous in her pretensions and in her blind acceptance of grave peril; the country mouse is ludicrous, made absurd because of betrayal by her sister and by circumstance but not because of internal flaws such as vices or stupidity; and Gib the cat is neutral as a comic agent, neither absurd nor evil but rather a terrifying natural force to be endured. Few comic agents are ludicrous, as most suffer defects of character or judgment. An agent's moral condition frequently colours our perception of his or her situation in relation to humour. But whether or not an agent is comic is not necessarily or exclusively determined by his or her moral condition. The

paddock, for instance, is morally repellent, corrupt and wittily treacherous; yet she suffers a ludicrous reversal, unexpectedly robbed of apparent victory by a seemingly random death. Likewise, the unjust legal claims brought against the lamb by the dog are ridiculous, but the dog is not a comic figure. Comic depravity does not assure a character's comicality. Yet the comic or ironic elements attending actions of serious moral consequence, as here, enhance the horror of a situation through the incongruous clash of moods.

Neutral agents like Gib, the widow and her hounds (The Cock and Fox), and the shepherd and his dog (The Wolf and the Wether) have the appearance and flexible quality of stage furniture: they seem to be objects that are introduced--as are chance events--to forward the action. Neutral characters tend to be agents of death, like Gib or the gled; or, at the opposite extreme, figures of innocence, helpless and even righteous victims like the country mouse and equally ludicrous poor husbandman, or the oxen, lamb, and kid threatened or eaten by the fox. Their presence may or may not arouse the reader's emotions. What makes them "neutral" is that they behave naturally (or according to traditional symbolic associations): they appear to make no choices and, mechanically following normal impulses, commit no acts which prove morally significant.

"Good" minor characters (as distinct from passive innocents) are so distinguished because they take actions which are morally positive. They usually function as guardian and/or authority figures: for example, the mare and ewe (The Trial of the Fox), and the goatherd (The Fox and the Wolf), are all agents of retributive justice, justice which is often ironically effected. They are peripherally involved in the action, and contribute to the moral tone of the Fabillis'

comedy. Justice in all its forms is a recurrent theme throughout the Fabillis. This is especially true for the comic fables: the serious satires, such as The Sheep and the Dog, are more usually concerned with injustice.²⁷ For example, the three fables which make up the miniature Reynard-cycle explore poetic justice (the deceitful fox is gulled in like manner by his victim), divine justice (the fox foresees and inadvertently fulfils his "fatal aaventure," 616), and human justice (the fox breaks and pays the penalty of the king's laws), respectively. Most secondary characters--the victims, the authority figures, and the agents of death--individually contribute to the ironic working out of justice.

Wicked characters are the usual objects of comic justice. These are also the most interesting characters from the standpoint of humour, for many of them are ridiculous, comically inferior and absurdly self-defeating. They may be wanting intellectually, like the wether, the paddock-duped mouse, the jasp-scorning cock, or the cadger; deficient morally like the fox or Chantecleir's wives; or, like Chantecleir and the wolf, inferior in both realms.

Four characters or character-sets are ridiculous in a special, subordinate context: the town mouse; Noble the lion (in The Trial of the Fox); Freir Wolf Waitskaith; Chantecleir's wives, and the servant-girls briefly referred to in The Cock and the Jasp. They have in common being comically flawed, but none are notable rogues, or, it would seem, consciously evil. They are secondary characters, and none of them (except possibly Waitskaith) are deliberately involved

27. The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman comically treats the theme of injustice; though the oppressive, stupid wolf's comic reversal is at least poetic justice.

in trick-playing episodes, central to the comic fables' plots. Nevertheless, they themselves may be betrayed, as Noble's law is by Father War; or they may betray themselves (e.g. the servantgirls) and others, as the town mouse betrays her sister, Waitskaith the fox, and the hens their husband. As secondary comic figures, they each contribute to the action without being the main focus of attention. That is, they are not necessarily involved in the central climax of the poems in which they appear. What is significant about them in general is that these characters are satirized in terms of the social groups they represent, thereby adding an extra comic dimension to the main themes of various fables. Henryson satirizes the rising merchant class and royal government in the persons of the town mouse and Noble the lion. The portraits of Freir Waitskaith, and the hens and servantgirls, belong to the anti-mendicant and anti-feminist satiric traditions, respectively.

The town mouse epitomises the newly-powerful burgess estate. She is ridiculous for both mental and moral shortcomings, although she is neither dull-witted nor villainous. She is naively optimistic about her future prosperity (asked how long she expects it to continue she replies cheerily "euirmaire, I wait, and langer to," 278-79)--absurd in the face of constant dangers. And worse, she is criminally negligent of her sister's welfare, abandoning her to fate when they are both threatened. Otherwise, successful in town life, she seems mentally capable. Her chief sin is "pryde" (208), a pride which stems from and manifests itself in terms of her elevated social status. As a privileged "gild brother," she was

made ane fre burges,
Toll-fre als, but custum mair or les,
And fredome had to ga quhair euer scho list
Amang the cheis and meill, in ark and kist.
(172-75)

Her pride, of course, is absurdly unwarranted. She may go where she pleases among the cheese and meal so long as she is not caught by the cat. Both mice are in fact thieves ("pykeris," 203): the country mouse forages "in the corne, in vther mennis skaith" (167); and the town mouse trades in goods not her own.²⁸ But, while the country sister, befitting her occupation, lives and suffers "soliter...as owt-lawis dois" (168), the burgess mouse lives a comfortable bourgeois existence.

The haughty town mouse indulges comical nouveau riche pretensions. She mocks her own origins, her sister's poor dwelling ("Lat be this hole and cum vnto my place," 246), and "scorns" (211) the indelicate country fare offered her: "this victuall and 3our royall feist / May weill suffice for sic ane rurall beist" (244-45). As her young sister ironically points out, however, both are born of the same parents, and her town sister is blameworthy for putting on "gentle" airs that are unjustified:

"I and 3e lay baith within ane wame;
I keip the ryte and custome off my dame,
And off my syre, leuand in pouertie,
For landis haue we nane in propertie."

(214-17)

Neither sister was born to land or property. But despite her ungentele birthright, the burgess mouse apes the nobility as best she can at her own table: "Ane lordis fair thus couth thai counterfeit / Except and thing: they drank the watter cleir / In steid off wyne" (271-73). She emulates the bourgeoisie's secular interests and social concerns, a fact encapsulated in the line "Withowtin grace thai wesche and went

28. Elsewhere she is confirmed in theft: "Ane quhyte candill owt off ane coffer stall" (286).

to meit" (268). Comically, they neglect divine matters but are careful to observe social manners. Religious form and spiritual values are conspicuously absent. Religious observance and festivals become simply a metaphoric secular comparison, ironically devalued: "My Gud Friday is better nor 3our Pace; / My dische likingis is worth 3our haill expence" (248-49). When they arrive in town, "Withowt God speid thair herberie wes tane" (262; my italics). The burgess mouse travels "Bairfute, allone, with pykestaf in hir hand, / As pure pylgryme, scho passit owt off town" (181-82; my italics). But she is not on a spiritual errand, contrary to the suggestions of her appearance; and in seeming "poor" she disguises her station and wealth from thieves along the route. Her reason for so travelling, and her behaviour generally, is worldly and not righteous. She is ruled by appetite, through habit having made her stomach her god:

"To tender meit my stomok is ay vsit,
 For quhy I fair alsweill as ony lord.
 Thir wydderit peis and nuttis, or that be bord,
 Wil brek my teith and mak my wame full sklender,
 Quhilk vsit wes before to meitis tender."
 (220-24; my italics)

Henryson, echoing spiritual admonitions (Philippians 3:18-19),²⁹ warns in the moralitas:

O wantoun man that vsis for to feid
 Thy wame, and makis it a god to be;
 Luke to thy self, I warne the weill on deid.
 The cat cumis and to the mouss hes ee.
 (381-84)

Sudden change in fortune is also a major theme in the fable (330-33, 371). Our attention is drawn to the social-climbing country mouse, beset with perils. But her sister, in her comically unwarranted self-satisfaction and optimism as well as her false-valued appetites and

29. See MacQueen, Robert Henryson, op. cit., 126.

secular allegiances, is also ripe for a fall. She is selfish and ironically hypocritical in all things. Henryson satirizes the vain pretensions, worldly pride, and spiritual blindness of the Third Estate in the person of the town mouse.

Turning to the First Estate, there can be little doubt that Noble the lion represents James III.³⁰ The portrait of a king governing is at once respectful and to a degree sympathetic, yet, though the criticisms are ironically understated, unmistakably satirical. Noble's bearing and appearance, bejewelled with riches and weighty emblems of office, is majestic (873-79). He seems gracious; and his speeches, suitably, are in the Latinate high style: when Noble's quaking subjects fall subserviently to the ground, he

...bad thame, with ane countenance full sweit,
"Be not efferit, bot stand vpon 3our feit.

"I lat 3ou wit, my micht is merciabill,
And steiris nane that ar to me prostrait;
Angrie, austerne, and als vnamyabill
To all that standfray ar to myne estait.
I rug, I reif, all beistis that makis debait
Aganis the micht off my magnyficence:
Se nane pretend to pryde in my presence.

"My celsitude and my hie maiestie
With micht and mercie myngit sall be ay.
The lawest heir I can full sone vp hie
And mak him maister ouer 3ow all I may.
The dromederie, giff he will mak deray,
The grit camell, thocht he wer neuer sa crous,
I can him law als lytill as ane mous."

(927-42)

Noble's aureate speech, bordering on comic bombast, is splenetic, pervaded by a defiant tone of threat. Despite his "countenance full sweit" and "merciabill" temperament and designs, Noble's tyrannous nature is evident. His subjects are terrified of him, obeying out of

30. MacQueen, *ibid.*, 149-53. He cites heraldic evidence. Fox, notes to lines 873-79, remains non-committal about identifying the lion.

fear rather than love and duty. "Angrie, austerne, and als vnamyabill," he threatens to "rug" and "reif" any beast who opposes his will. Later he flies into a short-tempered rage that sends Father War and the wolf scurrying with fear: "Rampand he said, 'Go furth, 3e brybouris baith!' / And that to ga withowtin tarying" (999-1000).

Noble further demands that "nane pretend to pryde" before him. But this ironically implies that he is the figure of greatest pride; and he behaves as if it were so, believing his will to be law. But in raising the humblest and casting down the highest at will--a suggestion that blasphemously seems to call to himself divine powers--he takes to himself the ability, and plays the part, of Fortune. Because he seems to act on whims, such behaviour conveys a suggestion of Fortuna-like blindness and irrationality. Noble's absurd claims, however, extend far beyond his natural powers. He declares the king's peace at his newly called parliament:

"Se neir be twentie mylis quhair I am
The kid ga saiflie be the gaitis syde;
Se tod Lowrie luke not to the lamb."
(943-54)

Yet the fox slays a lamb much nearer home, "within ane myle, in contraire to 3our cry," as the ewe ironically complains (1073). Noble's law then may be seen as properly motivated but finally an empty declaration. Human law is flawed because it is overly ambitious and ineffectively administered.

Nor are these the only passages which point up the ironic discrepancy between an ideal and the real king. Noble can also be criticized for the incongruous choice of ambassadors he sends out to fetch the mare. Of all creatures, he selects Father War, in spite of his reputation for rascality; the clerical wolf is included in turn by the fox, who attempts to excuse himself. Both are known scoundrels, "bry-

bouris baith" as Noble himself declares, and hardly ideal representatives of the king's government.

Finally, Noble is a figure of wit. He caps the fox's joke at the wolf's expense by turning a proverb into a quipping observation: "Be 3one reid cap I ken / This taill is trew, guha tent vnto it takis: / 'The greitest clerkis ar not the wysest men'," (1062-64). Thus the whole court is set "in garray and in gam" (1067). Jestng does little to enhance Noble's royal dignity, and, worse, it makes him seem nearest in character to Father War: they become associated due to their cruel and scornful wit. In addition to his other faults, fox-like behaviour casts Noble even further into an ill light. Henryson has to be careful in criticizing his sovereign, but the satire of the king and his government is unmistakable.

Freir Wolf Waitskaith, unlike the fox or lion, is a figure of witlessness. There is a traditional enmity between the fox and wolf in the Reynard epics; and the wolf's name means "one who lies in wait to do harm." But, instead of deliberately concocting a treacherous scheme, the wolf inadvertently contributes to the fox's downfall. The fox, that is, comically manipulates the wolf throughout their encounter, and so doing outwits himself. Waitskaith, who seems pious rather than sinister, does not have the cunning to confound the fox. But the wolf is scandalously negligent in his trusted position in the community, so spiritually counterproductive he may as well have planned to work the fox a mischief: the effect is the same. It seems more insidious that, ironically, the wolf should work evil in attempting to minister to another's spiritual needs.

Waitskaith is described as "ane worthie doctour of diuinitie...in science wonder sle" (666-67). "Worthy" takes on ironic connotations,

as it does so often in Chaucer's work, and the comically ambiguous "science wonder sle" proves to be empty praise indeed. A Franciscan friar, Waitskaith makes a show of his religious devotion: "To preiche and pray was new cum fra the closter, / With beidis in hand, sayand his Pater Noster" (668-69). Henryson tacitly suggests that the mendicant cloister is a den of wolves. The fox, making an equally hypocritical show of respect by bowing and scraping (671-73), seizes on the wolf's outward appearance of piety:

"3e ar the lanterne and the sicker way
Suld gyde sic sempill folk as me to grace.
3our bair feit and 3our russett coull off gray,
3our lene cheik, 3our pail and pietious face,
Schawis to me 3our perfite halines."
(677-81)

His false high praise--"perfite" is surely ironic--is not unavailing. Waitskaith's response, accompanied by a foolish giggle that indicates a spiritually ignorant mind, reveals that he is as easily deceived as he is susceptible to flattery: "'A, selie Lowerence.' quod the volf, and leuch, / 'It plesis me that 3e ar penitent'," (684-85). Taken in, Waitskaith completely misjudges the fox's character and sincerity.

Waitskaith, like Chaucer's Friar Huberd, is a limitor, licensed to travel and empowered to preach and hear confessions, for which he might accept charitable donations. He is also like Friar Huberd in that

Ful swetely herde he confessioun
And plesaunt was his absolucioun:
He was an esy man to yeve penaunce.³¹

Friars had the advantage over parish clergymen in that they could travel, that they had a reputation for giving light penance, and that

31. Chaucer, A221-23.

they were not around to check that a sinner was obedient.³² Wait-skaith fulfils these traditional expectations. The fox denies he is contrite (699-702), to which the sardonic wolf replies, "Weill...in faith thow art ane schrew" (703), instead of properly suspending the proceedings until the fox was more of a mind to satisfy the sacramental demands. Neither is the fox prepared to abjure from a sinful way of life, in effect comically insulting the wolf for being a beggar by preferring himself to remain a thief outright (705-11). Yet, wanting "pointis twa / Belangand to perfyte confessioun" (712-13), the wolf proceeds to administer a penance. The penalty he imposes in order to grant full remission is so absurdly easy it amounts to no penance at all. Waitskaith merely asks that Lowrence "forbeir flesche vntill Pasche" (723), the normal, minimal requirement of Lent for all Christians. Worse, he rescinds part of this simple demand, allowing the fox to lap blood and eat head, feet, and tripes twice a week, falsely reasoning that "neid may haif na law" (727-31). Where the fox would obtain such delicacies is not discussed, but the presumption is that he would have to continue his thievish ways by killing for them, comically undoing the whole effect of his confession.

The fox is allowed to believe he is shriven of his sins when in fact his lack of contrition and non-penance leave him as lost a soul as ever. He is perhaps worse off for suffering under the delusion of having satisfied God's laws. The wolf has added to, not relieved, the fox's spiritual danger, in effect conspiring with the fox to ensure his damnation. The wolf has failed in his duties, confusing moral

32. Friedman, op. cit., 557, points out that the friars claimed to be superior confessors because they had better casuistical training (as once they did), and on the grounds that they were poorer, holier, and so more likely to be answered.

laxity with leniency. Waitskaith entirely perverts his office, embodying most of the traditional abuses (save sexual) associated with the friars in anti-mendicant satires. Henryson, without making a single overt satirical remark against the friars, reveals the damage they can do and roundly condemns them as a spiritual menace.

Although the widow, the mice, the toad and the mare are all female, they are in a sense neutered in that their gender in no fundamental way determines their actions. Behaviour that is particularly female is relevant only for two groups of characters, the "damisellis wantoun and insolent" of The Cock and the Jasp and Chantecleir's three wives, all of whom belong to the anti-feminist satiric tradition.³³ The hens represent the only sustained look at female characters in the Morall Fabillis.

Henryson takes a brief but damning view of the wanton maidens in casting about for a reason to explain the jasp's presence in the midden:

As damisellis wantoun and insolent
That fane wald play and on the streit be sene,
To swoping of the hous thay tak na tent,
Quhat be thairin, swa that the flure be clene.
Iowellis ar tint, as oftymis hes bene sene,
Vpon the flure, and swopit furth anone--
Peradventure, sa wes the samin stone.

(71-77)

Pointed to in an aside, this is all the attention that the maidens receive in the fable. But we learn that they are careless, insolent, vain, and idle. Self-centred, they wish only to be out playing and gossiping, to be noticed in the street. Such is their hurry to finish their chores that they accidentally discard precious gems. In sym-

33. The anti-feminist satiric tradition is examined more fully in Chapter Five, pp. 383-96.

bolic terms they are even more culpable than the cock, with whom they are comically compared. He at least notices and considers the jewel of knowledge before rejecting it. Swept outside the realm of their consideration, the gem of wisdom is contrasted with their foolish love of the world. The ironically understated portrait of feminine folly, pride, and vanity is brief but quite pointed.

Chantecler's wives fall firmly into the anti-feminist satiric tradition of sexually and generally dissatisfied fabliau wives. As Chantecler is stolen by the fox, Henryson suspends the main action in order to introduce Pertok, Sprutok, and Coppok besmirching his character and discarding the "tragedy" in seven stanzas of "disputatioun." Comically, they prematurely discuss Chantecler in the past tense, assuming his death a foregone conclusion.

Pertok, following the widow's swooning lead, begins with an absurd courtly lament for a lost lover.³⁴ Her attention is concentrated on his attractive physical attributes as she recounts the noble qualities of their "drowrie and...dayis darling" (495-501). But it is not long before the sexually selfish nature of her sorrow clearly emerges:

"Quha sall our lemman be? Quha sall vs leid?
 Quhen we ar sad quha sall vnto vs sing?
 With his sweit bill he wald brek vs the breid;
 In all this warld wes thair ane kynder thing?
 In paramouris he wald do vs plesing,
 At his power, as nature list him geif.
 Now efter him, allace, how sall we leif?"
 (502-508)

She mourns him in terms of cupiditas, speaking of his literal and sexual appetite. Pertok is not sorry at all for Chantecler: she looks immediately for a replacement lover, and ironically concludes on a heartfelt note of self-pity.

34. See MacQueen, Robert Henryson, op. cit., 140-43.

Self-centred romantic regret reverts to self-centred fabliau joy at freedom as Pertok's chanson d'amour is abruptly countered by Sprutok's chanson de mal mariée. Sprutok revels in their release from a worthless partner, describing him in traditional terms as an impotent lecher, tyrannously "angry...And woundit with the speir off ielowsy," yet "off chalmerglew...waistit" (516-18), sexually spent. She blithely adopts the widow's mantle, comforting Pertok with such comically heartless proverbs as "als gude lufe cummis as gais" and merry renditions of "wes neuer wedo sa gay" (512-15). Her holiday air of jollity is as comically exaggerated in its response to events as were Pertok's grotesque Christ-references applied to the cock at the opposite extreme ("he wald brek vs the breid: / In all this world wes thair ane kynder thing?"). Pertok, finding her true thoughts unexpectedly voiced by her sister (that is, she "fen3eit faith befoir," 523), swells her dissatisfied chorus in a hypocritical volte face of feeling. She condemns Chantecleir's "lust but lufe"; yet, ironically, she acknowledges that a dozen Chantecleirs "wald not suffice to slaik our appetyte" (524-26), and carelessly supposes that they shall find a better lover within a week (528-29).

Pertok and Sprutok condemn Chantecleir physically. Coppok, "lyke ane curate...full crous" (530), denigrates him spiritually. She affirms her sisters' accusation that his faults were sexual; but, instead of scorning his inadequacy, she advances the contradictory charge of lechery ("seis coud he nocht with kittokis ma than seuin," 533). She declares that this "verray vengeance" is a result of his unrepentent adultery (536). It is true, as she implies, Chantecleir is guilty of incestuous polygamy. But such charges are only applicable in the human world, not the animal world. There is an incongru-

ous discrepancy between the literal and figurative modes in making this accusation, just as there is a mock-heroic absurdity in Pertok's original lament.

But, even ignoring the comic discrepancy between levels and the improbable notion that any creature would be purged from the earth for luxuria, the least of the mortal sins, Coppok accuses him of the wrong crime. The moralitas makes it clear that Chantecleir's failings are those of pride and vainglory (591-93), not sexual lapses like lechery or adultery. Coppok touches on his pride only in connection with his sexual sins:

"Prydefull he wes and ioyit off his sin,
And comptit not for Goddis fauour nor feid,
Bot traistit ay to rax and sa to rin,
Quhill at the last his sinnis can him leid
To schamefull end and to gone suddand deid.
Thairfoir it is the verray hand off God
That causit him be werrit with the tod."
(537-43)

Coppok represents the opposite kind of comic wife from her lecherous sisters, dissatisfied because of a frigid dislike of sex. She despises the cock's male pride, applying to him the word "rax," to domineer, comically significant in this context. She does not pronounce a theologically sound minor moralitas; instead, ironically, she unconsciously projects onto Chantecleir her own reasons for damning him, in her own way as selfish as Pertok and Sprutok. They have burdened the cock with equally personal assessments of his faults. Coppok, however, in contradicting their motives for condemning him, reveals a much uglier streak of character. She claims not to speak for herself but for God. She speaks unjustly from the Seat of Judgment when, as Chantecleir's fellow creature, neither omniscience, judgment, nor vengeance are her province. Her condemnation is comic in its absurd presumption and pretentious pride. But her judgment is dishonest,

pitiless, and blasphemous, and so morally much more odious than the mere flagrant selfishness of her sisters.

In damning Chantecleir the hens succeed only in unconsciously and so ironically damning themselves. Whatever his shortcomings, theirs are far worse. Between them the hens are hypocritical, grudge-bearing, lecherous, pitiless, and blasphemous fabliau wives. Their testimony is selfishly motivated and mutually contradictory, and so cannot be trusted except as an ironic guide to their own sins. Their whole consideration revolves around sexual matters, and there is little hope they will be redeemed as Chantecleir redeems himself from folly.

The sex of a character is rarely a factor in motivating the fables' agents. But when femininity is significant, Henryson consistently adopts a satirical misogynistic attitude.³⁵ Though habitual appetite is a comic (and tragic) motif running throughout the Morall Fabillis, there is a marked absence of appetitive and erroneous sex. No plots involve solatium, for all passages of anti-feminist satire occur outside the main action, thematically related but almost gratuitous additions. Instead, the Morall Fabillis are dominated by essentially all-male plots of stultitia, plots of cleverness and folly involving tricks and abundant treachery, and sometimes self-deception.

iii. Wit-Butt Relationships

Treachery is a common feature of most of the Morall Fabillis,

35. Henryson does not dwell on the subject, but in the Fabillis and elsewhere he has no good word to say about human sexuality. We have seen Makyne disrupting the pastoral peace of Robene; Eurydice, figuratively, is "affection," the appetitive will (Orpheus and Eurydice, 431); and luxurious Cresseid is redeemed by caritas but only after a painful educational process of renouncing cupiditas. Only in "The Bloody Serk" is the king's "dochter fair" a positive figure; but, symbolizing mankind, her sex is thematically irrelevant.

whether serious or comic; but the comic plots usually involve treachery with the intent to deceive, to overcome opponents by guile. That is, the deception of one character by another is a central component of all but one of the comic fables. In The Two Mice, the exception, the victim is not deliberately deceived; yet unintentional deception and comic betrayal are involved, for the burgess mouse fails to inform her sister about the dangers of town life and neglects to mention where the hiding places are located. The effect is the same as if she had wished to trick her country sister.

The characters engaged in comic treachery hold to a wit-butt relationship. One is a cunning trickster, who manipulates others and adapts himself quickly to changing situations; and his victim is an ignorant gull, usually as morally defective as he is intellectually inferior. Tricksters are frequently wicked by nature. Superior laughter dominates: the wit-figure exploits the gull's capacity for folly, or the wit-figure is occasionally caught up in follies of his own making. But, depending on the degree of irony present in these tricks, there is also incongruous laughter, often providing the fables a multifaceted humour.

The divine faculties of speech and reason are restricted to man and higher creatures such as angels. Fable animals, using the components of logic and speech (cf. "Prologue," 44-47), are similitudinous of "how mony men in operatioun / Ar like to beistis in conditioun" (48-49). Fallen man is simply a reasoning beast, often turning the heavenly gifts of language and reason to brutal ends, perverting logic to achieve selfish desires and to justify sinfulness. Wit is usually a sign of intellectual depravity, of reason recklessly--and because spiritually careless, often comically--bent to achieve damnable goals.

The paddock in The Paddock and the Mouse is less a comic figure than an odious and sinister one. But she is a wit-figure, ironically using her intellect for evil purposes when debating with the mouse. The mouse, wanting help over the water but frightened of the hideous-looking toad who offers aid, draws back distrustfully: "giff I can ony skill off phisnomy, / Thow hes sumpart off falset and invy" (2824-25). Quite properly she cites clerical authority, the accepted scientific opinion on the relation of the soul to physical appearance ("Ane thrawin will, ane thrawin phisnomy," 2830), and concludes her argument logically with a fitting "lorum," a Latin proverb (2831-32).³⁶ The cunning toad, however, expertly counters her scientifically accurate observations, refuting her arguments with a "natural" example and by citing Scripture:

"Na," quod the taid, "that prouerb is not trew,
For fair thingis oftymis ar fundin faikin.
The blaberyis, thocht thay be sad off hew,
Ar gadderit vp quhen primeros is forsakin;
The face may faill to be the hartis takin.
Thairfoir I find this scripture in all place:
'Thow suld not iuge ane man eftir his face.'

"Thocht I vnhalsum be to luke vpon,
I haue na wyt; quhy suld I lakkit be?
Wer I als fair as iolie Absolon
I am not causer off that grit beutie."
(2833-43)

She plays on our natural sympathy for those helplessly afflicted, twisting the mouse's compassion to work against her better judgment. Her arguments--one cannot help one's appearance, and besides appearances are deceiving--are sound, an equally weighty match for the mouse's points. Scripture, probably 1 Samuel 16:7 or John 7:24 and

36. In The Trial of the Fox as well, ll. 971-77 (possibly a spurious addition, not present in Bannatyne), the fox's foul appearance is assumed to equate with a "fylit spreit."

and 2 Samuel 14:25-18:10,³⁷ is even higher authority than the wisdom of "clerkis." Yet, though overcome logically, the mouse's insight proves horribly correct; and the dark irony of this devil citing Scripture to disprove the truth and so accomplish her own nefarious designs carries an awful humour.

The chief figure of wit in the Morall Fabillis, of course, is Lawrence. The fox is not only a cunning deceiver, he is also frequently an ironic comedian. His deceits often carry the comic savour of pranks; that is, his are not merely clever tricks but tricks often administering poetically just punishments on his victims, on whom he breaks jesting comments. The fox is a prototype of the picaresque hero, invariably a wicked rogue but nevertheless admirably self-sufficient, witty, and even likable. It cannot be said that we sympathize with the villainous fox. But, given characters' wit-butt relationships, as readers we naturally tend to side with the rogues against the fools: both are usually morally deficient, but at least the wits are intelligent; and we experience a certain satisfaction, a comic release from moral restraint, in seeing clever wickedness thrive and fools punished. The use the fox makes of wit is damnable, however; and if we admire or identify with his abuse of reason's faculties we are in spiritual danger ourselves. Henryson frequently builds a favourable impression of the fox only to turn comically against the reader's feelings of approval by emphasizing his wicked nature in the

37. The reference to Absalom is an additional irony, for he is a figure of beautiful appearance but possessed of a traitorous heart. He fits the toad's description of one "off silkin toung and cheir rycht amorous" yet "with mynd inconstant, fals, and wariand" (2848-49). The toad herself, though ugly, ironically has a silken tongue and mind "Full off disait and menis cautelous" (2850).

body of the tales or in the moralitates.

Lowrence in action represents brain comically triumphant over brawn. He has not the strength to overcome the wolf, nor the ability to fly after Chantecleir. Therefore he must outwit and outmanoeuvre them. Comically, he persuades his opponents to contribute willingly to their own downfall: Chantecleir is made to stand still for and turn a blind eye to foxish treachery; and the wolf is invariably crippled in situations he gladly embraces, enabling Lowrence to make good his escape. The fox beguiles his victims with calculated hypocrisy and flattery, putting on a show of humble subservience while at the same time appealing to their vanity. He has perfected a comically obsequious act. Pretending humility, the fox falls on his knees before those he will deceive, making bows of homage (433, 671-73, 1961-63). Continuing to ingratiate himself and inflate his dupes' self-esteem, he praises and expresses a desire to serve them, never failing to use a deferential "Schir"-address (452-65, 677-81, 2014-19).

His ironic method of persuasion to harm through flattery clearly operates in The Cock and the Fox. Falling to his knees before the startled cock, the fox charms him with honeyed speech:

"Schir, be my saull, 3e neid not be effraid,
Nor 3it for me to start nor fle abak:
I come bot heir seruice to 3ow mak.

"Wald I not serue to 3ow, it wer bot blame,
As I haue done to 3owr progenitouris.
3our father oft fulfillit hes my wame,
And send me meit fra midding to the muris:
And at his end I did my besie suris
To hald his heid and gif him drinkis warme;
Syne at the last, the sweit swelt in my arme."

"Knew [thow] my fader?" quod the cok, and leuch.
"3ea, my fair sone, forsuth I held his heid
Quhen that he deit vnder a birkin beuch,
Syne said the Dirigie quhen that he wes deid."
(436-49; emend. Bannatyne)

The fox comically adopts the role of an old family retainer, a priest.³⁸ He swears twice by his non-existent soul--an incongruous human reference--and by the "blissit sacrament" (455), suggesting in such phrases as "I did my besie suris" and "said the Dirigie" that as a curate he administered last rites to Chantecleir's father. Like the paddock, his hypocrisy is intentional; but, unlike her, he disguises his meaning not in ironic lies but in ambiguous truths which often take the form of grim puns. The fox has come to serve Chantecleir as he has the cock's father and ancestors, a kitchen pun in accord with the ironic reference to the cock's father having filled the fox's belly. The fox performed his "besie curis" in "the muris" and "vnder a birkin beuch," that is, in the woods, the fox's den, rather than legitimately in the open farmyard. "That sweet," in the mock-heroic phrase from romance literature "that sweit swelt in my arme," is a gastronomic pun reminding us of the fox's confession to Freir Waitskaith, wherein he admits "me think that hennis ar sa honie sweit" (700). He held the old cock's head, no doubt between his teeth, and administered a different sort of last rites than the ecclesiastical sacrament understood by Chantecleir. The truth is laid before the cock, if only he has the intelligence to see it. But Chantecleir's one-line response deftly conveys the success of the fox's strategy. The cock is no longer afraid but intrigued, obviously flattered by the attention. He assumes a superior position, signalled by his use of the thou-address to the "lower class" fox, a subtle indication of his mental drift. And he has no understanding wit. This is indicated by his

38. There is a woodcut in Caxton's Reynard of the fox in clerical garb addressing the cock with a false proclamation of the king's peace: see Donald B. Sands, ed. The History of Reynard the Fox, (London & Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1960), 163.

foolish, perhaps slightly nervous, pleased giggle. The empty, unperceptive fool's laugh is in the mouth of Waitskaith as well, taken in by Lowrence's flattering show of humility (684); and in the lark's mouth as she disregards the swallow's warning in The Preaching of the Swallow (1741). Such a witless laugh reveals a soul in danger of damnation. The cock has been effectively cozened. It only remains for Lowrence to round off his offer of service with praise of the cock's beauty (653-54)--comically reflecting the vision the cock has of himself--and make a slightly unfavourable comparison between Chantecler and a father he was obviously too young to remember. Chantecler is caught at the height of his pride ("inflate with wind and fals vane gloir," 474), the fox's silly pawn, comically attempting to emulate his "noble" ancestors.

Lowrence has confidence enough in the cock's ignorance and gullibility to tell him an ambiguous, ironic version of the truth without fear of being properly interpreted. This is a comic ploy he often adopts with the wolf as well, mocking his fellow's unperceptive and vacant wit. Usually he intends to deceive the wolf in ironically telling the truth, but not always. Much of the comedy of the fox's confession to Freir Waitskaith lies in his unabashed impenitence: he repents only that he has not stolen more (702-703); he refuses to abjure thievery (707-11); and he will only accept a penance if he finds it "licht, schort, and not greuand" (719-20). His responses, ironically, are not deceitful but honest; he seems to believe that merely telling the truth is by itself all that is necessary to effect a confession. In fact, honesty is only one, albeit essential, element in meeting the sacrament's requirements. He has been hypocritical in flattering the wolf in order to solicit his aid. He continues his

spiritual hypocrisy by confessing sincere wickedness with the expectation of forgiveness; but he finally succeeds only in deceiving himself.

Using the truth ironically is an incongruous method of deception. Lowrence also employs it in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger, as an escape clause should the wolf survive his treachery and seek revenge. The first third of that fable is devoted to the fox's attempts to wriggle out of the wolf's press-gang service. The fox comically exaggerates the humility topos in trying to beg off, claiming he is a known felon and so unable to hunt successfully (1961-2010). The wolf, ironically aware of the fox's trickery yet still unable to perceive it operating, praises the fox's cunning resourcefulness and point by point refutes his arguments. Barely mollified by the fox's sudden acquiescence, the wolf demands that Lowrence swear an oath of loyalty to him (2021-22). The fox, continuing his hypocrisy by substituting false agreement for false humility, comically feigns indignant protest:

"Schir," said the foxe, "that ane word maks me wraith,
For nou I se 3e haue me at ane dreid:
3it sall I sweir, suppois it be nocht neid,
Be Iuppiter, and on pane off my heid,
I sall be trew to 3ou quhill I be deid."

(2023-27)

Wording his oath as might a clever lawyer, the fox leaves himself three loopholes--telling the truth to the wolf if he has the wit to comprehend it. His first defence is a comic smokescreen, suppois it be nocht neid: at face value it means "even though it is unnecessary"; but it can also mean he will swear so long as he is not compelled to do so. He has already affirmed that he is "at ane dreid." His oath is made under compulsion, and this fact negates any claim on his loyalty. His second loophole is his use of the "wrong" god, Jupiter, a

pagan deity, indicating a false oath. When the treacherous paddock swears her loyalty oath to the sceptical mouse, she also calls on Jupiter to witness her false promises (2869). Calling Jupiter to witness is the equivalent of swearing to the Devil; the oath is not binding at all. Finally, the fox swears that he will be true to the wolf "quhill I be deid," and so he remains until his false "death" by the roadside. Comically, he adheres to the letter of his word, and no more. His compliance under duress prepares us for the fox's betrayal of his "maister" at his earliest opportunity, a betrayal which of necessity will render the wolf incapable of avenging himself. Again he tells the wolf no less than the truth, sending him out to obtain the "nekhering" promised by the cadger (2115). Cleverly using the truth to effect his tricks, the fox arms himself with defences too subtle for the wolf. Lowrence, having provided all the necessary clues to his real intent, can then betray him with a clean conscience. In addition, he is able to cozen a greedy cadger, unsuspecting of getting something for nothing, into the bargain. Ironically foreshadowing events, the fox includes in his oath the traditional phrase "on pane off my heid," but his actions will lead cunningly to the pain of the wolf's head.

Lowrence puts on a spectacular display of wit in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman, taking advantage of chance circumstances and manoeuvring both the wolf and farmer to serve his selfish ends. It is an unusual fox-fable: it is Aesopic rather than Reynardian ("In eld-eris dayis, as Esope can declair..." 2231), though the fox and wolf, in their usual comic wit-butt relationship, are the principle characters. Lowrence is addressed by the wolf in an inferior "thow," and he answers back "schir" (2300-301); but he behaves much more as the wolf's

equal, forgoing his usual hypocritical fawning and flattery, and actually taking a superior position when the litigants appoint him to judge the case (2314). Finally, differing from other fox-fables, Lowrence resorts to ironic lies instead of ironic truths to work his deceptions against the wolf.

His lies are ironic not simply because he tells falsehoods, but because he tells obvious falsehoods. The husbandman, irritated with his oxen, wills them to the wolf in an idle outburst, not realizing that the wolf is within earshot (2242-44). Lowrence initiates the legal action himself by encouraging the wolf to take the oath literally. It is not the wolf's idea, but a cunning sleight of the fox, who chuckles wickedly to himself as he thinks of each new trick (2248, 2329, 2345, and 2282). Yet, as a judge bribed by the husbandman, he reproaches the wolf for pressing his lawsuit: "'Is this in ernist,' quod he, '3e ask sic thing? / Na, be my saull, I trow it be in heithing'" (2339-40). His mock-incredulity and tentative, deprecating assurance that the wolf must be in jest is comic audacity at its height, given the fact that the wolf knows the fox himself proposed it. Lowrence follows this with an ironically hypocritical protestation: "Wald I tak it vpon my conscience / To do sa pure ane man as 3one offence?" (2348-49). He continues in this vein with empty rhetoric, "Schir, trow 3e not I have ane saull to keip?" (2363), finally suggesting "be my saull, 3our self had all the wyte" (2367). Each of these ideas are outrageous comic lies: the fox prompted the wolf to take the farmer's word "in ernist"; the fox's conscience is free, as both parties have sworn to abide by his judgment; the fox's comic litany of references to his soul serves only to remind us that he has no rational soul to keep; and the blame is all the fox's, not the wolf's,

for it was Lowrence's initial idea to bring suit. The fox's argument is built of manifest lies, yet the wolf does not have the wit to see or challenge them. Given his profound stupidity, we can better believe the fox can persuade him that the moon's reflection in the well is a large summer cheese (2394-98). The fox adds a final ironic lie as he presents the prize: "'Schir,' said Lowrence, 'anis 3e sall find me leill'" (2393). Completing the comic trick, Lowrence usurps the wolf's place in robbing the poor husbandman, at the same time rendering the wolf incapable of revenge.

The husbandman is an unusual comic butt in that he is a morally positive agent victimized as much by chance as by another's wit. He is, then, more a ludicrous than a ridiculous figure. He contributes only inadvertently to his downfall, and he minimizes the effects of treachery wherever possible. He may have been sincerely angry with his oxen, but his threat was not intended seriously. Unluckily, he was overheard by a clever rogue. It is bad luck again that he challenges the wolf to produce a witness (2278), as Lowrence happens to be lurking in the background: "The man leuch na thing quhen he saw that sicht" (2296). Realizing that he is lost, the husbandman eagerly strikes a less ruinous bargain with his corrupt judge (2326-28). He is neither wicked nor stupid, but unlucky; and once he has escaped them he remains on his guard ("And on his heit woke the dure quhill day," 2374), taking, however belatedly, appropriate precautions against intruders. Although he has been tricked, his victimization arises from accidental circumstances, not foolish behaviour.

Typically, however, the comic dupe contributes to his own gulling. Ironically, he becomes an equal--if unwitting--partner with the wit-figure in executing the tricks. The fox's witty treacheries depend

upon comically flawed victims, agents who are not only intellectually weak but morally corrupt or corruptible. The fox's flattery and obsequious act, his fraudulent tricks, would not succeed if his victims were not vain and proud, and were not ignorant of his real nature. Indeed, even when the wolf reveals an awareness of the fox's guile ("For euerie wrink, forsuith, thow hes ane wyle," 1987), he stupidly does not consider that such trickery might be turned on him: he asks advice on how to obtain the nekhering ("quhat counsell geuis thou me?" 2130), and so suffers an almost fatal beating in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger.

Chantecleir, as we have seen, is a butt-figure of foolish pride and intense "vane gloir," playing the passive agent to the fox's active principle. In Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale the cock is the main character, and though he is gently mocked he nevertheless remains admirable. In Henryson's version of the fable,³⁹ Chantecleir is decidedly not a sympathetic figure; and the focus of the tale has shifted almost wholly away from the cock to Lowrence, the portrait of a wily flatterer. Chantecleir is not so much a character as an object. Comically vain, he is described no less than five times in terms of his physical appearance or characteristic properties: by the narrator (415-17; "curageous" conflicts ironically with Sprutok's judgment, 591); by Lowrence, who flatters him (453-54); by his wives, comically exaggerating their praise and condemnation (497-501, 516-19); and

39. That Henryson was influenced by Chaucer's fable is posited by Donald MacDonald, "Henryson and Chaucer," op. cit., 451-61. Elsewhere, in "Narrative Art in Henryson's Fables," SSL, 3 no. 2 (Oct. 1965), 101-113, MacDonald praises Henryson's high degree of originality in retelling the fable. His admiration is warranted; but a study of Henryson and Chaucer's differences would finally prove more instructive.

finally by the cock himself, made wiser by his injuries (577). He is talked about, talked at, discussed in absentia; but he is virtually abstracted out of the tale as a personality. We almost never penetrate his negligible mental life:

The Cok, inflate with wind and fals vane gloir,
That mony puttis vnto confusioun,
Traistand to win ane grit worschip thairfoir,
Vnwarlie winkand walkit vp and doun,
And syne to chant and craw he maid him boun.

(474-78)

The references, ironically, are more than faintly Edenic, applicable to Adam at the moment of his fall: proud, vain, trusting to win greater glory, and liable to ruin; indeed, the fox's methods of working "confusioun" are precisely those of the Serpent in paradise. When we do see into the cock's motivation, as we had in his half-line response to the fox (446), the picture is most unflattering.

There is no good word to be said for any of the barnyard fowls. All are comically marred with major defects of character. We are unable to sympathetically identify with Chantecleir, and the various "objective" views enhance his comic potential as a gull. Chantecleir is conspicuous only for mental poverty, and even his escape seems more accidental than deliberate. Rather than engineering his own release, he is instead "with sum gude spirit inspyrit" (558). His enlightenment seems to come to him from an outside source. The fable is more concerned with Lowrence, defeated by a conspiracy of unlucky circumstance and an apparent chance stroke of genius on the part of the cock. The fox, besieged by pursuers and so frightened, momentarily suffers a lapse of wit, comically defeating himself. Our pleasure in the cock's escape is somewhat inhibited, for although he seems to have learned from his experience finally we cannot be sure that he has changed in any fundamental way; and we recall with dismay the family

life to which he returns. He has made an "inspired" escape from death, and presumably the process has been educational, but he does not completely transcend the dupe's role.

The wolf is the usual victim of Lowrence's comic treachery. He is, like the priest-lovers of fabliaux, the bête noire of the fable world, the butt of satiric ridicule continually suffering unhappy but deserved reversals of fortune. He is powerful but indefatigably stupid, proud, susceptible to flattery and so easy to deceive. His character is transparent: apart from the few traits mentioned he exhibits little personality; neither are his mental processes explored nor his motives questioned. Like the cock, the wolf's empty-headed, compliant gullibility makes him seem more an object than a personality. That is, the more he is seen to resist intelligent choice--despite foresight and the correct information at his disposal--the greater his comic potential: his behaviour, in the Bergsonian phrase, incongruously appears as "something mechanical encrusted on the living." He behaves in a comically fixed manner, whatever the situation.

Both the cock and the wolf are morally flawed. But the wolf is culpable beyond mere defects of personality such as pride. He represents variously the soul-destroying corruption of the mendicant orders (666), an ignorant chancellery official (1014), a reiving manor lord living "vpon purches" (1953), or the landed gentry oppressing poor farmers (2280-83). The wolf is a figure of naked force and ignorant power-abuse. Yet his strength is rendered impotent through his witlessness. Once, in a parody of the Wheel of Fortune, the wolf is trapped at the bottom of a well (2422), symbolically damned.⁴⁰ On

40. The wolf, that is, is halfway to Hell. Compare the wolf in water to his waist with Father War's dead father, cast into a peathole full of water and commended to the Devil.

the other two occasions of his physical defeat the wolf is pummelled savagely on the head, as if in ironic comment on the weak point in his defences. Not only incapable of perceiving and interpreting information correctly, the wolf is unable to learn from experience--part of his comically mechanical behaviour. When, guided by the self-interested fox in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger the wolf loses his servant, meal, and all but his life--comically thwarting all his expectations--we feel sure that he finally has no idea what went wrong. The wolf is morally degenerate, like the fox, but more repugnant because he is brutal, witless, and unlovable; and because his defeats are just and deserved, we feel no pity for him. Our superior laughter at the gull is untainted by any sympathetic emotion.

Only once, in The Wolf and the Wether, does the wolf see through a trick played on him; and even then he makes the discovery by chance, not design. With the wether we come to a third category of comic wit-butt characters, the wit-figures who defeat themselves. These creatures--the wether, the cock who rejects the jasp, and the two foxes of the miniature Reynard-cycle--are capable, intelligent, adaptable. But they contrive inadvertently to outsmart and so confound themselves. Wit alone is not sufficient to forestall failure; righteous virtue and judgment are required as well as knowledge. Otherwise, morally defective, they are prone to selfishness and pride; they are self-blinded and fatally forgetful, and so over-reach themselves. Such defeats are both serious and comic: comic, because their mistakes are accidental and avoidable; serious, because their mistakes lead to physical and/or spiritual destruction. A rough comic justice always operates in the workings of self-made fate: they do not suffer punishment until they selfishly abuse reason or commit a crime; both acts are varieties of

of spiritual error. Yet, because they embody a mixture of admirable wit and moral defect, these inspire mixed feelings in us when they are defeated.

The death of the zealous wether certainly provokes a mixed emotional reaction. He oversteps his natural bounds, meeting disaster while attempting to fulfil a more ennobled role than that for which he was designed. Allegorically he represents presumptuous social-climbers in hierarchically established medieval society (2545-601). Macbeth-like, the wether is literally dressed in "borrowed robes," physically incapable of discharging his new duties; and, though death is a hard penalty to pay, the fable's message is clear regarding the danger of presumptuous aspirations.

But the wether begins with such laudable intentions, even if logically absurd and impractical, that at first we cannot fault him. The good shepherd's dog dead "off suddand" (2463), the flock exposed to predators of all types, the shepherd himself out of his meager wits with despair, we sympathize with the wether's earnest desire to comfort and help, and perhaps even admire his courage. A gelded ram of course should be the most docile,⁴¹ and there is absurd humour in both his aggressive strategy (assuming the dog's role, 2497-99) and in his overconfident ambition; likewise the shepherd's eager credulity is absurd ("Quha sayis ane scheip is daft, thay lieit," 2492). Their situation is presented as desperate; and we are pleasantly and comically surprised when the disguised ram proves better than his word, chasing off all manner of merciless hunter under the protection of his dog-skin camouflage (2501-506).

41. MacDonald, "Narrative Art in Henryson's Fables," op. cit., 102-106. Fox, Notes p. 310, disagrees that the ram is castrated.

Naturally there is comic disparity between reality and his beliefs about himself. Foolishly, he comes to think he is the dog; and because of his temporary success he has the reader half-convinced as well. We slip very subtly, in the chase scene, from admiration to comic horror at his self-blinded pride and by now habitual overzealousness ("Went neuer Hound mair haistellie fra that hand," 2518; my italics). The first indication that he has badly overstepped the bounds of reason is when, starting to give pursuit, the wether "maide ane vow to God that he suld haue him" (2524; "him" refers unambiguously back to "his fa," the wolf, rather than possibly indicating the stolen lamb). Nevertheless, as his intentions seem good, his duty clear, and his excitement high, we are apt to pass quickly over this statement. The starving wolf, fleeing for his life under the misapprehension regarding the famous and ferocious "dog," finally casts aside the lamb for greater speed (2532).

With the recovery of the lamb further pursuit is not only unnecessary, it is completely foolhardy. What could the ram possibly do if he did catch his prey? But in his excessive, zealous pride (a surfeit of normally admirable courage) the wether confirms his madness: "in faith we part not swa: / It is not the lamb, bot the, that I desyre" (2534-35; my italics). His comic unmasking by the thornbush (2545) and the fable's comically earnest denouement swiftly follow. The wolf's farcical self-defilement is both comic and realistic, treated with grimly humorous seriousness. Still seemingly in his role of rapacious nobleman, the wolf, whose pride has been severely offended, is mocking in tone when he turns on the poor ram, an indication both of his relief and his restored confidence and mastery. It is clear he kills the wether, after first all but rubbing his nose in the fear-produced

evacuation, not out of hunger, the original reason he stole the lamb, but purely for revenge for the punishment the wether inflicted on his self-esteem (2557). The wether, however virtuous his original motives, has over-reached his abilities and his authority; and he perishes making helpless excuses, the chaser chased, a truster in Fortune, a victim of his own folly and figure of good intentions gone sadly wrong.

The cock of The Cock and the Jasp also strikes us initially as intelligent and well-motivated, so it is with surprise we learn in the moralitas that he "may till ane fule be peir" (142). He is endowed with worldly knowledge, ability in logic and rhetoric, and apparent restraint in forbearing presumptuously to possess the lordly jasp. Taking the erudite cock at his own level,⁴² he seems to make a socially correct and wise choice: the jasp properly belongs to the noble classes (81, 107-109); in addition, the jewel is inedible and so useless to him (90-91). Yet in citing the facts without recognizing their full implications, thereby rejecting the jasp ("Thow ganis not for me, nor I for the," 112), he ironically outwits himself in physical and particularly spiritual terms.

The substance of his discourse--especially the repeated reference to his desire for food (91-95, 99-105, 114)--reveals him to be practical only in a worldly sense, and a creature governed by his appetite. He has related moral defects, as he is a figure of wilfulness and "false intellectual pride"⁴³--notice again the superior-position "the-

42. Denton Fox, "Henryson's Fables," ELH, 29 no. 4 (December 1962), 337-56, points out that the cock seems at first to present a defence of natural man, common sense, and materialistic realism, but in fact his thinking proves to be faulty and appetite-oriented.

43. MacQueen, Robert Henryson, op. cit., 107-109.

thow" address. He is "foolish, self-satisfied, and materialistic,"⁴⁴ a worshipper of Mammon. He knows the jasp's place and worth but not its value, curiously ignoring it in personal terms for its lapidary virtues or purchasing power. Nor is ignoring its physical benefits the least of his failings: he is literal-minded, recognizing its earthly but not its spiritual significance. The jasp represents "science," which has temporal uses as well as heavenly excellence (128-38). Moreover, as both Jamieson and MacQueen have pointed out,⁴⁵ the style of his discourse helps to emphasize his foolishness: the absurd use--in terms of a "pure" cock scraping a midden for food--of exclamatio, proverb, declamatio, rhetorical question, and parallelism; and the unsettled mixing of stylistic levels (e.g. high and low vocabulary in the same sentence, 94-96). The cock's oddly modulated rhetoric contrasts sharply with the humility topos of the omniscient narrator, whose true "inward sentence" is proclaimed "in rude and hamelie dite" (117-19). The cock, having knowledge without understanding, and judgment without wisdom, proves himself a spiritual fool. Comically self-blinded, he smugly dupes himself out of spiritual betterment.

Unlike the wether or cock, the guilt-ridden foxes know themselves to be selfishly motivated. When Lowrence confesses his sins to Wait-skaith, or Father War disguises himself at the parliament, they do so attempting--albeit with comic inadequacy, failing to control their immoral impulses--to save themselves from imminent destruction. The guiding principle of the three linked fox-fables, "falset failzeis ay at the latter end," is comically if grimly fulfilled when the over-

44. Jamieson, "Robert Henryson," op. cit., 52.

45. Ibid., 41-45; MacQueen, Robert Henryson, op. cit., 106-110.

reaching foxes answer the needless deaths of the kid and lamb with their own lives.

Each has knowledge, a clear forewarning of impending death. Lowrence, due to his natural "instructioun" in astrology (642-45),⁴⁶ discovers in the stars his fatal "destenie":

"Myn auentour is cleirlie to me kend,
With mischeif myngit is my mortall fait
My misleuing the soner bot I mend;
Deid is reward off syn and schamefull end.
Thairfoir I will ga seik sum confessour,
And schryiff me clene off all synnis to this hour."
(650-55)

Lowrence recognizes the end to which his sins will bring him, and that he is doomed unless he amends; further, as an informed Christian, he knows the correct steps to take to remedy his present damnable state. (There is ironic foreshadowing in discerning that his "fait" is "with mischeif myngit," for self-wrought mischief seals his doom.) Lowrence does not lack information. Likewise, Father War has the wit to foresee that the establishment of justice threatens him:

"I wait this suddand semblie that I se,
Haifand the pointis off ane parliament,
Is maid to mar sic misdoars as me.
Thairfoir geue I me schaw, I will be schent;
I will be socht, and I be red absent;
To byde or fle, it makis no remeid:
All is alyke, thair followis not bot deid."
(957-63)

Not idly fearful, Father War acknowledges his real position and danger before the law as a "misdoar." He states twice that, stay or flee, the parliament will result in his death. Both foxes intuit a clear forewarning of what will happen; and, in the former's unrepentent confession and in the latter's literally "lame" excuses, both father and

46. Jamieson, "Robert Henryson," op. cit., 190, notes that Reynard was a well-known astrologer; he had studied magic at Toledo.

son take comically ineffectual steps to forestall disaster. But, ironically, neither can control their "natural" states, or overcome their habitual wickedness. Their speeches are full of self-pity, but they remain unchanged in character. Witty successes--deceiving Wait-skaith and avoiding the mare's hoof--inflate their pride. Though cognizant of peril, pride leads them to be forgetful and to over-reach themselves: at the first opportunity they break the respective laws of the Church ("Thow sall...forbeir flesch vntill Pasche," 723) and King Noble ("The tod Lowrie luke not to the lam," 945)--specific demands which ironically foreshadow the cause of disaster. Comically, they themselves accelerate their jeopardy precisely when they ought most to be on their guard. Neither behaves as if he held any illusions about his guilt: both try to hide or run away after they commit their crimes (Lowrence "Vnto ane derne for dreid he him addrest," 755; Father War, accused by the ewe, immediately "let draw," 1075). Wit, providing the prophecies of death, ought to be the key to survival; wit could have and should have guided their actions. Ironically, wit leads to self-blinded pride, to swift, avoidable, self-inflicted destruction.

iv. Irony; Verbal Comedy

Throughout the Morall Fabillis the discrepancy between an agent's beliefs and reality or desires and satisfaction, an act's motives and intentions and an act's actual effects, or literal statements and ambiguous meanings are frequently comic paradoxes.⁴⁷ The study of

47. Discrepancies such as these require that we participate in the characters' mental lives, as observed directly in speech or thought, as we are told of motives by the narrator or characters, or as we are able to infer motive through action.

Henryson's fables is often a study in irony. There are many different definitions for the term, but in general we may say that the various kinds of irony are forms of incongruity.⁴⁸ These incongruities simultaneously involve the superior vision of the ironist (narrator or character), and/or--or, that is, if the irony is situational or the verbal irony is "unintentional"--the superior vision of the beholder, recognizing the ironic meaning. Ironic tone may be serious or comic in context. In The Sheep and the Dog, for example, the sheepdog sues the sheep for his wool before a court packed with predators like the wolf ("partles off fraud and gyle," 1155) and gled; further, the dog is called "Perrie" (1166), and being himself "shaggy" ironically has no personal need of the fleece but simply obeys his greed. The situation is ironic, but grimly so, for the satiric context is deadly serious. Much of the Fabillis' irony, however, is comic. We have already explored different kinds of comic situations and verbal techniques which are comic: for example, pointing up man's pretensions and limitations by switching human and animal modes; comic foreshadowing; wit-figures intentionally betraying gulls through puns and other "truth-

48. See Norman Knox, The Word IRONY and Its Context, 1500-1755, (Durham, North Carolina: 1961), esp. pp. 10-30; and one of the best modern summaries, D.C. Muecke, The Compass of Irony, (London: 1969), esp. pp. 4-39. Muecke's discussion of the nature of irony and ironists, its victims, and so forth, is comprehensive; and this "compass" is quite extensive. He cites two basic classes (verbal and situational); three grades (overt, covert, and private); four modes (impersonal, self-disparaging, ingénu, dramatic); and many types. Among the types: the dry mock, sarcasm, blame-by-praise and vice versa, pretence (of advice, encouragement, doubt, attack, defence, omission, of censure, etc.), rhetorical questions, intentional or unintentional fallacious reasoning, understatement, overstatement, and other stylistic signals (e.g. leitmotiv, parody, burlesque, travesty, or mock-heroic). Virtually every comic technique may be construed as ironic; but I shall discuss techniques which have specific names--such as litotes--as other kinds of verbal comedy.

ful" deceptions; or pride-blinded self-betrays. Henryson's comedy is rooted in irony, and he employs three basic kinds: verbal irony; situational irony; and verbal and situational ironies in combination.

Verbal ironies are the most obvious.⁴⁹ These are the narrator's or the agents' statements or thoughts, whether intentional or not, which are contextually ironic. Context is essential, distinguishing the ironic from the merely comic. Puns, for example, are not necessarily ironic, but may become so in a particular context. The fox assures Chantecleir that he wishes to "serve" him; given his attempt to take the cock home for dinner, the simple pun takes on ironic dimensions. Speeches may be broadly ironic, as are those of the learned but ultimately foolish cock in The Cock and the Jasp. Or speeches may be more pointedly ironic, as when Lowrence complains of his hard lot as a thief in The Fox and the Wolf:

"Allace," quod he, "rycht waryit ar we theuis!
Our lyif is set ilk nicht in auenture,
Our cursit craft full mony man mischeuis,
For euir we steill and euir alyk ar pure;
In dreid and schame our dayis we indure,
Syne 'Widdinek' and 'Crakraip' callit als,
And till our hyre ar hangit be the hals."

(656-62)

His comic lament is ironic on several counts. He upsets conventional expectations, complaining as if he were a poor honest man beset with troubles in a wicked world; he is self-pitying but unrepentent, deploing the names applied to him and his fate as gallowsbait, but he never suggests he ought to follow an honest occupation; and he risks

49. By "verbal irony" D.C. Muecke, Irony, The Critical Idiom Series No. 13, (London: 1970), 49-51, means more generally "Behavioural Irony." He includes many kinds of modes and meanings--for example, musical parody--not strictly linguistic media, although ironic uses of language are most common. I am here strictly considering ironic uses of language.

his life, not daily, but "ilk nicht" (light and dark symbolism works obviously and consistently throughout the Fabillis), a belief in which he is ironically mistaken, for he hazards his life and dies later "Vnder ane busk, quhair that the sone can beit" (756). The comedy and ironic implications of his speech in relation to the whole fable are both immediate and far-reaching.

The narrator contributes several varieties of verbal irony, speaking for himself, commenting on the action, and even speaking through another character. In the "Prologue," Henryson strives for a stylistic middle ground appropriate to his matter, neither too high (excess) nor too low (defect):

In hamelie language and in termes rude
 Me neidis wryte, for quhy of eloquence
 Nor rethorike I neuer vnderstude.
 Thairfoir meiklie I pray 3our reuerence,
 Gif 3e fynd ocht that throw my negligence
 Be diminute, or 3it superfluous,
 Correct it at 3our willis gratus.

(36-42)

His invocation of the traditional humility topos, couched in an obviously knowledgeable "superfluous," aureate high style, and following three effective and memorable similies used to defend his efforts in the fable genre (8-25), is wittily ironic, a jest demanding a knowing audience. (The fox later employs a similar, ironic humility topos in attempting to argue his way out of the wolf's service, 1965-2015.)

More typically, however, the narrator offers pointed, understated ironic comments on the action: for example, when the two mice flee their meal in terror before the spenser, the narrator supposes that "thay taryit not to wesche" (295), ridiculing their earlier pretension to refined table manners. Chantecleir escapes the fox, and the narrator suggests that the fox may be somewhat disappointed: "Now iuge 3e all quhairat schir Lowrence lewch" (571). Or the narrator

notes that Father War displays "naturall pietie" (824)--a pun on "natural," or illegitimate offspring--by throwing his father's body into a peathole, ironic after describing Father War's joy at his father's death. In showing three leopards bearing the crown of King Noble, Henryson manages a heraldic joke at the expense of the English, ironically subordinating the English royal arms to the Scottish crown.

Henryson even wittily manages to displace narrative irony by creating a dream-Aesop for the purpose of telling The Lion and the Mouse. The dreamer begs for "a prettie fabill / Concludand with ane gude moralitie" only to have the "poet lawriate" of animal fables shake his head sadly and express doubts about their efficacy: "quhat is it worth to tell ane feinzeit taill, / Quhen haly preiching may na thing auail?" (1385-90). Aesop's ironic doubt further defines and so defends fables, simultaneously criticizing the listening public for spiritual deafness (1391-97). In the fable's moralitas, Henryson continues to shield himself ironically behind the satiric Aesopic persona by putting overt if unspecified criticism of the Scottish aristocracy in the mouth of his dream-Aesop (1611-18).

The narrator, then, is occasionally a verbal ironist as well as ironic observer, revealing flashes of sardonic, fox-like wit. Verbal irony appears most frequently in the mouths of wit-figures such as Noble, when capping the fox's jest on the wolf (1063-64); the Scripture-manipulating paddock; and especially the fox. Lowrence is fond of making ironic use of the truth, as when he tells the wolf in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman that the "summer cheese" (the moon) is an unstealable great prize:

"na man suld it steill.
Schir, traist 3e weill, 3one caboik 3e se hing
Micht be ane present to ony lord or king."
(2396-98)

The fox also makes ironic comments on the action he himself initiates, either directly or in jesting at his victims. In the same fable, the farmer bribes Lowrence with seven fat hens to find in his favour, at which the acquiescent fox laughs drily "I am ane iuge" (2329), a statement ironic in both the immediate and larger context of the tale. And, having tricked the wolf into jumping in a well-bucket and so descending into a trap, Lowrence makes a punning joke of their situation by replying to the wolf's complaints "thus fairis it off fortoun: / As ane cummis vp, scho quheillis ane vther doun!" (2418-19). The ironic jest at his master's expense is figuratively as well as literally apt, providing a commentary on the whole action.⁵⁰ The fox can also be self-deprecating, assessing his own failures with irony. Having lost Chantecleir, who scorns his own gullibility, Lowrence replies: "I wes mair fule...coud nocht be still, / Bot spake to put my pray in to pleid" (581-82).

Butt-figures as well contribute verbal ironies, whether they intend to or not. Irony in the mouths of comic gulls is likely to be unintentional. The mouse, for example, demands that the paddock swear fidelity by taking "the murthour aith" (2865). Through this, ironically, both will die. Or in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger, the wolf refutes the fox's pleas by citing the proverb "Falset will fail 3e ay at the latter end" (1996). Not only is the wolf wrong in terms of the fox (but not in terms of himself), ironically foreshadowing events, the phrase echoes The Cock and the Fox (568): in that fable it was also applied to the wicked fox, but then vindicated the principle un-

50. Examples of the fox's witty puns, jokes, and comments could easily be enlarged beyond those already discussed: cf. lines 470-71, 581-82, 740-41, 751, 760, 1052-53, 2153-57, and 2322-35.

ambiguously. The ironic cross-references have rendered the phrase extremely complex.

Yet, occasionally, comic gulls display an ironic wit of their own. The country mouse, rightly suspicious of her sister's townish "paradise," asks "how lang will this lest?" (278). Receiving the answer "for euermair," absurd in fact and in exaggeration, she responds with dry, ironic skepticism: "Giff it be swa, 3e ar at eis" (279-80). Later, barely escaping the cat, she heartily "defies" her sister's invitation to bide with her, using an ironic food metaphor: "Thy guse is gude, thy gansell sour as fall; / The subcharge off thy seruice is bot sair!" (345-46). The wolf in The Wolf and the Wether, likewise having accidentally escaped victimization, turns on the undisguised wether who had frightened him and ironically observes: "Me think 3our teith ouer schort to be sa kene" (2571). The self-deprecating ironic wolf, having comically defecated from fear (2566-69), subtly suggests that the next thing he evacuates will be the wether himself: "I schot behind quhen thow ouertuke me euer. / Bot sikkerlie now sall we not disseuer" (2584-85). This episode, incidentally, is the only use Henryson makes of scatological humour.

Verbal irony depends on "an ironist being ironical"; situational irony "is the irony of a state of affairs or an event seen as ironic."⁵¹

51. Muecke, Irony, op. cit., 49. He elaborates: "Verbal Irony raises questions that come under the headings of rhetoric, stylistics, narrative and satiric forms, satiric strategies; Situational Irony, while raising fewer formal points, tends to raise historical and ideological questions--Who first saw that sort of thing as ironic? What sort of things do we regard as ironic?...We look at Verbal Irony from the ironist's point of view but at Situational Irony from the ironic observer's point of view. Verbal Irony tends to be satiric; Situational Irony tends to be more purely comic, tragic, or 'philosophic'" (p. 51).

That is, ironic perception depends not upon an ironist (narrator or character) but on an ironic point of view in the observer (witness or audience). For reader's purposes, however, situational still, in a sense, will be "verbal" perceptions, as shaped language is the medium of literature.

The Trial of the Fox provides an example contrasting the two kinds. Father War returns to court with the hoof-bloodied wolf; and when Noble inquires after the uncooperative mare, Father War makes an ironic joke at the wolf's expense:

"My lord, speir not at me,
This new-maid doctour off diuinitie,
With his reid cap can tell 3ow weill aneuch."
(1051-53)

His witticism, playing on the dress of a doctor of divinity with the wolf's broken pate, is a verbal irony, a pun. Within the hour, however, Father War is condemned to hang; and "the volff, that new-maid doctour, couth him schrif; / Syne furth him led and to the gallous gais" (1092-93). The phrase "new-maid doctour" repeats. But here the situation is ironic: the wolf--presumably made wiser by his experiences, although this supposition is unnecessary--functions seriously in his new role, surviving a fox who has tricked him but who has also outwitted himself. The irony of the situation is enhanced by the comic parallelism: we recall that Freir Wolf Waitskaith, also "a worthie doctour of diuinitie" (666), had shriven Lowrence, Father War's parent, in very similar circumstances. Like father, like son, ironically in all things.

Lowrence and in turn Father War both predict their deaths and, paradoxically, inadvertently ensure the fulfilment of their own prophecies. Examples of poetic justice--such as the consecutive failures of the fox in the Reynard-trilogy, the wolf's unsuccessful attempts to

tyrannize the fox or farmer in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger or The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman, or the unexpected death of the murderous paddock--all constitute situational ironies. Indeed, the machinations of justice generally in the Fabillis tend to be ironic: a dog hales a sheep before a falsely packed court and literally fleeces him; Noble declares the king's peace within twenty miles of his court, yet that peace is broken "within ane myle"; the birds have it in their power to destroy the crops which will be made into nets to catch them, yet scorn the swallow's warnings and are thus slain.

In fact, situational irony is the one element common to all of the Morall Fabillis. That is, the plots of each of Henryson's fables, whether comic or tragic, turn on situational ironies. To enumerate each instance would prove tedious, but it is worthwhile to touch on the breadth and variety of situational ironies. Ironies may be only as broad as the narrative premise itself: a proud and ignorant cock, displaying false humility and learning, chooses to ignore the jewel of virtue and science; a wolf accuses a lamb of defiling his drinking water, though he stands upstream from the lamb. Or, in conjunction with ironic plots of cleverness and folly, fables may consist of subordinate ironic components. These may be substantial episodes within the whole: Lowrence sets up the wolf to receive the blows the cadger intends for him, instructing his gull how to arrange his body ("se 3our heid on ane hard place 3e lay") and shriving him against "na sud-dan deith this day" (2133-58); and the wolf is beaten so that "He mycht not se, he wes sa verray blind...Baith deif, and dosinnit, fall swonand on his kneis" (2184-88). Ironically, the wolf feigns death to be nearly clubbed to death, and is rendered physically blind and deaf to match his intellectual and spiritual condition. In addition,

Lowrence cozens both the cadger and the wolf, remaining unscathed, in possession of the herring, and freed of both when both had wished to use him for their own purposes. On the other hand, ironic situations may be as small as the deliberate confusion of the literal and figurative worlds by interjecting into the fables realistic animal or human details: for example, a little mouse by "ane reuer syde...mycht not waid, hir schankis wer sa schort; / Scho culd not swym; scho had na hors to ryd" (2778-80; my italics).

Ironical situations also have varying degrees of complexity and subtlety. Father War, appropriately born like his forbears on the wrong side of the blanket (807-809), begins his independent career blasphemously thanking God for his father's death:

till him is he went,
Tuke vp his heid, and on his kne fell doun,
Thankand grit God off that conclusioun,
And said, "Now sall I bruke, sen I am air,
The boundis quhair thow wes wont for to repair!"
(812-16)

Pitilessly casting the flayed corpse into a peathole, he commends the bones to the Devil.⁵² The narrator assures us that Father War dreads "na thing the samin lyfe to leid" (821) and has learned nothing from his father's experiences and death ("to the end, attent he tuke no moir," 823). The black humour of his unnatural behaviour plays off our conventional expectations for a true "naturall pietie" and better understanding. The situation is doubly ironic because as a bastard Father War would have had no rights had his father not taken the trouble

52. A sidenote: the proverb quoted by Father War, Ay rynnīs the foxe als lang as he fute hais (827), has puzzled critics, who have taken it as a reference to his dead father. But perhaps he refers to himself? In his joy at inheritance he seems to be hurrying the burial with all speed and with no ceremony, perhaps literally running in his happiness, something equivalent to dancing on the grave.

to obtain his heirship legally by means of payment to a perhaps too-compliant Church (798-800). The irony is heavy-handed and multivalent, satirizing equally those collecting legacies for illegitimate heirs as well as heartless legacy hunters.

An ironic situation occurs in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman which is just as complex and subtler in degree. The satire on judicial bribery is obvious, with the additional irony that the judge, Lowrence, has instigated the proceedings himself with a view to his own profit on the flimsiest of legal pretexts. But, bad as he is, ironically Lowrence seems to be the lesser of the two evils. Had the wolf taken his "dice," all the oxen, the farmer would be ruined. The fox--accepting a bribe--agrees to help, fixing a lower, non-ruinous price (seven hens but carefully preserving the breeding cock, 2528) in return for services rendered. It is tempting to see the comparative effects of the manor lord (the wolf) and the secular judge (the fox) on the farmer as an oblique commentary by Henryson on the shifts of power in late-fifteenth century Scotland; but, without more solid historical evidence, it is impossible to prove.

In accepting the bribe, Lowrence remarks with conscious irony "God is gane to sleip" (2332). This is a blend of verbal and situational ironies. Verbal irony, as noted, depends on context--as does situational irony, the difference between them essentially being ironic point of view. Therefore it is sometimes difficult to separate verbal irony from the situation being remarked on. What I mean by a combination of the two is an ironic comment made by the narrator or character on the immediate comic or ironic situation. When the enlightened wolf in The Wolf and the Wether comments "Me think 3our teith ouer schort to be sa kene," for example, we have verbal irony; but the ironic sit-

uation, the insane chase, has passed, and they have reverted to their normal predator-victim relationship. That is, the ironic situation no longer exists. Perhaps an illustration from The Trial of the Fox will help to clarify the distinction. Both Lowrence and Noble make jokes at the wolf's expense before the parliament (1052-53, 1064), and these are verbal ironies. But the ironic situation which provided their joke has passed, and in effect they comment in a new context. At the time of the wolf's injury, by contrast, Father War and the mare each made dry, mocking understatements, commenting on the wolf's folly:

"Allace," quod Lourence, "Lupus, thow art loist."
 "His cunning," quod the meir, "wes worth sum coist."
 (1025-26)

Father War uses the inferior thow-address, signalling his superiority. Further, the mare invites Father War to try his luck reading her "letter" (1027-28). But the fox declines politely, citing a contextually ironic Latin proverb (proof of his learning and ability to read): "Felix quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum" (1033). Having suspected her trick in advance--confirmed by the wolf's fate--he is ironic in pretending to take her seriously. And there is an additional ironic dimension: he claims to regard it as wisdom to learn from the mistakes of others; yet, as we have seen, he has a fatal blind spot in regard to his father's errors. Both sets of mare and fox commentaries combine verbal and situational ironies.

There can be no blends of situational irony with inadvertent verbal irony: by definition, unwitting ironic remarks are made by individuals who do not fully perceive the situation as outsider observers do. In The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger the cadger finds the "dead" fox and misquotes a proverb: "Heir lyis the Devill...deid in ane dyke" (2063). His misquote is ironic because the correct version of

the proverb, "Seldome lyes the diuel dead by ane dyksyd,"⁵³ reveals the actual situation that he fails to perceive, multiplying his folly. Combinations require the ironist to be aware of at least one ironic dimension of the situation upon which he remarks. Later, for instance, the vengeful cadger spys the wolf attempting the fox's identical trick, and remarks ironically: "Be I begylit twyis, I schrew vs baith! / That euill bat it sall licht vpon thy banis / He suld haue had, that hes done me the skaith" (2176-78). The situation is further ironic because the wolf has quite forgotten "the foxe and all his wrinkis" (2167); the cadger, contrarily, has been "Thinkand ay on the foxe that wes behind" (2170).

The Fox and the Wolf is the fable richest in ironies, verbal, situational, and in combination, elements of which I have already discussed. The fable's *basic* premise, the wit outwitting himself, is ironic. Lowrence expresses a belief in astrologically-governed fate, yet seeks a remedy from the Church, which preaches free will; ironically, it is his bad attempt to meet Christian obligations which lead him, unshriven and unrepentent, to the fatal "natural" death that the stars foretold.⁵⁴ Because Lowrence is blinded by miscreant beliefs (indeed, blind to the full astrological implications), and fatally ignorant of the nature of God's world, most of his statements are unintentionally ironic. Unwilling to repent, he confesses only one regret at the slaughter of lamb and chickens: "that I haif slane sa few" (703). He refuses to accept an honest occupation, supporting his thievish predilections by twice citing "neid" as an excuse (echoed

53. See Fergusson's Scottish Proverbs, ed. Erskine Beveridge, STS New Series 15, (Edinburgh & London: 1924), 89, MS. no. 1176.

54. MacQueen, Robert Henryson, op. cit., 146, notes that the stars' configurations point to the real reason (appetite) and the specific end (an arrow through the appetitive organs) of the fox.

by the wolf, "neid may haif na law," 731):

"And I forbeir, how sall I lief, allace,
Haifand nane vther craft me to defend?
Neid causis me to steill quhair euir I wend.
I eschame to thig, I can not wirk, 3e wait:
3it wald I fane pretend to gentill stait."
(707-711)

In his pretence to a "gentill stait" he exhibits mock-fastidiousness in regard to begging (Waitskaith's occupation) as well as stubborn, illogical insistence on his present employment, his natural "craft." This statement, "I eschame to thig, I can not wirk," directly echoes the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:3-13), whose allegiance is to Mammon and not to God.⁵⁵ Similarly, Lowrence's unrighteous, materialistic and appetite-governed attempts to regain the Lord's favour are not merely unavailing, ironically they worsen his sinful state. Further, as John Friedman points out, in claiming need the fox denies free will and blames God.⁵⁶ Lowrence's modified acceptance of Waitskaith's simple Lenten "penance" proves short-lived, for he despairs of fishing, saying that he had better "biddin at hame / Nor bene ane fischar, in the Deuillis name" (738-39; my italics). Only two statements are consciously ironic, blending verbal and situational ironies. The fox knows his effort to effect transubstantiation, and so adhere to the letter of the law, are false: drowning the goat and saying "Ga doun, schir Kid, cum vp, schir Salmond, agane" (751) is a blasphemous parody of the sacrament of baptism, a small joke with the most perilous consequences. Finally, symbolically pierced through his appetite organs,⁵⁷ the fox dies with a quip, ironically commenting on his own

55. MacQueen, *ibid.*, 148.

56. *Op. cit.*, 558.

57. Jamieson, "Robert Henryson," *op. cit.*, 209-211, points out that the arrow, in iconographic terms, is often a sign of God's judgement.

situation:

"Me think na man may speik ane word in play
Bot now on dayis in ernist it is tane."
(770-71)

He refers back to his deadly pun "Vpon this wame set wer ane bolt full meit" (760; my italics--"arrow most fitting"). Conscious of his failures, he makes light of his own damnation.

The Morall Fabillis display a wide variety of ironic and comic verbal devices. The hens' self-damning debate concerning Chantecleir's merits is described as a "disputatioun" (494). Disputatio features prominently in most of the fables, whether ironic (the cock in effect carries on a dialogue with himself in The Cock and the Jasp, 79-111; The Paddock and the Mouse, 2819-71), serious (The Lion and the Mouse, 1427-1502;⁵⁸ The Preaching of the Swallow, 1790-1817; The Wolf and the Lamb, 2631-98), or comic (The Two Mice, 209-251; The Cock and the Fox, 495-543; The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger, 1965-2027; The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman, 2239-2300, 2339-70; and The Wolf and the Wether, 2557-85). Through disputatio Henryson reveals an interest in logical, legalistic turns of mind. In the comic fables, disputatio usually exposes a perversion of reason: speech and logic are seen incongruously harnessed in the service of sin, as when the town mouse scorns the country diet and aspires to a richer fare, the paddock dismisses scientific truth, or the fox twists justice before his victims' eyes for selfish gain. On occasion, disputatio is used--with varying degrees of success--to dispell a predator's wrath. The

58. The overall tone of this fable is serious. But this is not to deny that their debate has its comic aspects, especially as regards the mouse's skill in logic and rhetoric. See Douglas Gray, op. cit., 74-76.

disguised wether, "skinned" and caught by the enraged wolf, feebly attempts to argue his way out of impending destruction:

"Schir," quod the Wedder, "suppois I ran in hy,
My mynd wes neuer to do 3our persoun ill.
Ane flear gettis ane follower commounly,
In play or ernist, preif quha sa euer will.
Sen I bot playit, be gracious me till,
And I sall gar my freindis blis 3our banis,
Ane full gude seruand will crab his Maister anis."

(2574-80)

The wolf slaps down these explanations with methodical logic, and increased indignation at being ill-used. The situation is similar to the fox's debate with the wolf (1165-2027), arguing to avoid impressment in the latter's service. The wether's "Maister...bot to haue playit with 3ow, / I 3ow requyre that 3e nane vther throw" (2558-59) comically echoes the fox's earlier "Bot nou I se he is ane fule perfay / That with his maister fallis in ressoning" (2014-15), lies equivalent in circumstance and desperate tone. For the wether, whose wit like his teeth is "overschort," there is no fox-like escape possible.

The echo of situation or phrase accounts for another comic technique: repetitio. Comic repetitions--episodes or words comic in themselves or because repeated in different contexts--appear within a single fable or in several different fables. The fox, for example, swears "By my saull" in various fables, always an ironic signal of his insincerity (436, 455, 2340, 2359). Both the fox and paddock ironically vow "be Iuppitter" in making hypocritical oaths (2026, 2869). Repetitio may be straightforward, as "Be my saull," or the identical phrase may take on an ironic meaning in a new context: as we have seen, the narrator's sober assertion that "falset fail3eis ay at the latter end" (568) acquires ironic overtones later in the wolf's mouth as he rebukes Lowrence (1997). Instances of repetitio include situations (e.g. the fox and the wolf playing dead before the cadger); and

even comic gestures, such as Lowrence falling subserviently to his knees before Chantecleir in a successful and finally in an absurdly fruitless attempt to beguile him (433, 573), an act of false humility he repeats for Freir Waitskaith and rejects as unhelpful in entreating the cadger (671, 2039).

Such repetitions serve as comic leitmotifs. The fable which uses repetition most consistently for ironic effect is The Two Mice. The town mouse, seeking reunion with her sister, demands "cry peip anis" (187) to reveal her whereabouts. When she repeats the phrase later (308), seeking her sister again after the latter has escaped the spenser by swooning, the context, ironically, is more serious. The town mouse, disgusted by simple rural fare, "had littill will to sing" (204); her townish feast, well supplied with delicacies, inspires the sisters to sing "Haill, 3ule, haill" (289). Upon arrival at the town mouse's dwelling "Withowt God speid thair herberie wes tane" (262); and, likewise forgetting God, "withowtin grace thay wesche and went to meit" (268), carefully observing the forms of secular courtesy. Later, when the spenser interrupts them, "thay taryit not to wesche" (295); and Gib the cat properly bids them "God speid" as he enters the room to destroy them (327). The rural diet of peas, beans, and nuts is scorned by the town mouse (222), but finally welcomed with relief as the younger sister gladly takes to the country again (361). Finally, both mice make reference to Lent ironically in the secular context of dining: persuading her sister to repair to her home, the town mouse insists "My Gude Friday is better nor 3our Pace, / My dische likingis is worth 3our haill expence" (248-49). In turn, the country mouse scorns her sister's rich but perilous diet:

"I had leuir thir fourty dayis fast
With watter caill, and to gnaw benis or peis,

Than all 3our feist in this dreid and diseis!"
(320-22)

Leaving, she finds God in her thoughts once more: "Almichtie God, keip me fra sic ane feist!" (350). Henryson builds a consistent pattern of repetitions in the fable, the second half of the fable as it were "answering" or ironically changing phrases, gestures, and situations from those of the first half.

Henryson's puns are almost invariably witty, often ironic. Such a pun is the fox's description of the wolf as "siluer-seik" (2036), simultaneous reference to the wolf's miserly greed and the colour of the herring he covets, an ironic comment on the poverty of his new master. Yet Lowrence is not the only punster. The narrator (e.g. "doggitly," 1072), Chantecleir (583), Noble (1064), and the cadger (2089) all cannot resist them. Even the normally dull wolf, in The Wolf and the Wether, musters a profoundly ironic pun when he turns the tables on the exposed ram: "is this 3e, that is sa neir? / Richt now ane hound, and now quhyte as ane freir?" (2549-50). White, literally of the fleece, is the appropriate complexion for the terrified wether; but, a more complex pun than that, the "white friars" were the Dominicans, who took their name from the Latin domini canes, "the hounds of God." The wolf also makes use of comic euphemism, describing his fear-produced evacuation as "fyling the wind" (2566-69). This contrasts with his unembarrassed reference to having "schute behind" in the previous sentence. Henryson makes only rare use of comic euphemism.

Only two puns are sexual in nature. Both of them, the standard euphemism for bedroom sport, "chalmerglew" (518), and--appropriate for hens--"claw our breik" (529), are spoken by Sprutok and Pertok, supporting their grossly venereal outlook on life. Libidinous material is all but excluded from the Morall Fabillis. Consequently, double

endendres and euphemistic puns are almost entirely absent. Similarly, Henryson does not exhibit the temperament of a scold. He rarely engages in the cruder, rather self-aggrandising comic techniques afforded in the flyting, insults, or comic invective. The hens' dialogue is the only sustained example of comic insult, and through it the hens only sully themselves. Dunbar also uses this technique of ridiculing female characters: he shows them unwittingly damning themselves by insulting others (e.g. The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo). Elsewhere, as in The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie, Dunbar makes a more straightforward use of comic insult.

The verbal mechanisms of Henryson's humour, then, are intellectual, that is, in concert with his matter, grounded in wit. Allied to the techniques of repetitio, ironic foreshadowing (251, 279, 649-55, 960, 2133-57, 2506, and 2832), and ironic puns and euphemism is his rather Chaucerian use of contextually ironic and comically misquoted or inappropriate proverbs and songs. Sprutok's message of comfort to Pertok, as we have seen, is stocked with them: "als gude lufe cummis as gais" (512); "wes neuer wedow sa gay" (515); and, echoing Matthew 8:22, "Let quik to quik, and deid ga to the deid" (522), not only comically premature regarding Chantecleir, but completely perverting Christ's message of spiritual duty. We have already had occasion to explore other examples: "neid may haif na law" (731); "Ay rynnis the foxe als lang as he fute hais" (827); "Felix quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum" (1033); "Heir lyis the Deuyll...deid in ane dyke" (2063); or "Ane thrawart will, ane thrawin phisnomy" (2830), to recall a few.

Two techniques of verbal comedy finally worth noting are comic exaggeration and litotes. Both devices contribute to the control of comic tone, having mirror-opposite effects from each other. At times

exaggeration takes the form of a "realistic" detail: for example, the burgess mouse flees Gib as quick "as fyre of flint" (328), the wether's incomparable vigour in the chase ("Went neuer hound mair haistellie fra the hand," 2518-23), the cadger's near-ecstasy at finding the valuable skin of a dead pest ("all the trace he trippit on his tais; / As he had hard ane pyper play he gais," 2061-62), or in Lowrence's assurance to the wolf that the bogus "nekhering" and summer cheese are too heavy to lift (2118, 2409). For the most part, comic exaggeration appears in the service of impassioned rhetoric, as in Pertok's haut courtois love-lament (495-508), the country mouse's feeling refusal to abide in town (320-22, 343-50), the fox's claim that the wolf's lawsuit "will not wyn [him] worth ane widderit neip" (2362), or even so small a touch as the widow's instructions to her dogs to "Reskew my nobill cok or he be slane, / Or ellis to me se 3e cum neuer agane" (549-50; my italics).

More frequently, Henryson makes use of ironic understatement. Examples of litotes, as we have seen, include: the two mice at their feast who "taryit not to wesche" when discovered; the fox who "off that new-maid salmond eit anewch" (753); the fox and mare commenting mockingly on the wolf's injuries (1025-26); the cadger, at first smugly noting "Schir Foxe, in faith, 3e ar deir welcum heir" (2067), who later "giff he lichtit doun or nocht, God wait!" (2174); or the wolf, remarking of the wether's disguise, "I fled ouer fer, and I had kennit the cais" (2551), and "Me think 3our teith ouer schort to be sa kene" (2571). Like comic exaggeration, many of the instances of litotes are found in the characters' speeches, and rarely in the mouth of the narrator, pointing away from the story-telling persona toward greater dramatic effectiveness.

v. Allegoria and Satire

As I.W.A. Jamieson has pointed out, the critical view of the mor-
alitates of the Morall Fabillis as dull formal obligations, or even
 gratuitous excrescences, appended to other wise delightful satiric
 tales was long in vanishing.⁵⁹ In recent years the arguments of Henry-
 son's "Prologue" have been taken more earnestly. The "morall sweit
 sentence" to be found in "the subtell dyte of poetry" (12-13) is a
 fable's raison d'être, no matter how felicitous it might otherwise be
 as a story. Defending his efforts, the first mention Henryson makes
 of "feinzeit fabils" is that they "be not al grunded vpon truth" (1-2;
 my italics). That is, unlike Scripture or historical chronicles, fables
 have no literal truth but only figurative value, showing "in simili-
 tude / How many men in operatioun / Ar like to beistis in conditioun"
 (47-49). His apologia presents an argument similar to Boccaccio's de-
 fence of classical (i.e. pagan) poetry. Boccaccio uses "fable" gen-
 erally to mean "fictitious narrative":

A fable is a connected utterance which, under the appearance
 of fiction, is exemplary or demonstrative, and which reveals
 its author's purpose only when the shell of fiction has
 been removed. And thus, if something savoury is discovered
 under the veil of fable, the composition of fables will not
 be a completely useless activity. I believe that fables form
 a four-fold species: and the first of those--i.e. when we
 represent brute beasts or even inanimate objects, as talking
 among themselves--altogether lacks, it seems to me, literal
 truth. In this category, the most important author was Aesop,
 a Greek to be respected not merely because he belonged to
 classical antiquity, but also for his serious moral purpose.⁶⁰

He goes on to discuss myth, epic, legend, and other fictions. This

59. Ian Jamieson, "Henryson's Fabillis: An Essay Towards a Revalua-
 tion," Words (New Zealand), 2 (Dec. 1966), 20-31. See also Clark,
 "Henryson and Aesop," op. cit., 1.

60. I quote the translation by John MacQueen, Allegory, op. cit., 47-
 48.

"serious moral purpose" is paramount. Clothed in the beauties of poetry, fables were only one (agreeable) method of teaching a moral lesson, the allegorical meaning--whether spelled out or not--that gave them validity. Without a polysemous texture a fable would be intellectually fruitless, delightful perhaps but merely an exercise in fantasy.

In the prologue to The Lion and the Mouse the narrator asks that the dream-Aesop "tell ane prettie fabill / Concludand with ane gude moralitie" (1386-87). Aesop, lamenting that Holy Scripture seems unavailing, is skeptical: "my taillis may lytill succour mak" (1389-97). It is apparent from their exchange that the purpose of fables is to "succour," rescue, its listeners; and that "ane gude moralitie" is an essential element in the telling. The rescue intended is intellectual, spiritual in nature; and this dimension of salvation is essential to Moral or Divine Comedy of all kinds. Almost a third of the Morall Fabillis are devoted to defensive prologues and unfailingly earnest explanatory moralitates. In addition to supplying the ethical justification for telling fables, they enable Henryson to control our responses to and enrich our experience of them.

Allegory is an integral part of the fables. The two basic strands of allegory applicable to medieval poetry are rhetorical and interpretive, respectively. Based on the ideas of Quintillian (Institutio Oratoria, VIII.iv.44-59), Isidore of Seville (Etymologiae, I.xxxvii.22-30), Bede (De Schematibus et Tropes Sacrae Scripturae, II.xii), and later grammarians, allegory was regarded as a rhetorical trope, a species of metaphor, an ornament or device which could signify another meaning than the literal meaning (significant allusion) or even signify

a meaning opposed to the literal meaning (inversio).⁶¹ Allegory as inversio was closely associated with irony, antiphrasis, enigma, sarcasm, proverb, and contradiction. Viewed as rhetorical schema, many of Lowrence's speeches are examples of comic if sinister allegory, allegory as irony, especially as Aristotle conceived it: "the ironical man makes jests for his own amusement, the buffoon for another's" (III. Rhetoric.2,Sec.D.v.).⁶² Broadly, allegory is used to say one thing in other words; and the element of contradiction between words and meaning is incongruous, ironic. The principle can generally apply not only to a particular schema but to the fable as a whole, the tale together with the moralitas, in which a significant shift in perception--to a superior vision--is involved.

Allegory as an interpretive tool descends directly from biblical exegesis, the four-level system of figurative interpretation established by John Cassian (c. A.D. 360-435) and refined by later authorities including Bede and Thomas Aquinas.⁶³ The four well-known textual meanings are the literal, allegorical, tropological (or moral), and anagogical (or eschatological), in ascending order of theological significance. In the early fourteenth century, Dante (Il Convivio, II.i) was apparently "the first to relate a theory of allegory, closely resembling that advanced by Aquinas, directly to the study of at least

61. Summarized by MacQueen, *ibid.*, 49-50. See also Quintillian, Institutio Oratoria, trans. Charles E. Little, 2 vols., (Nashville, Tennessee: 1951), I, 216ff.; Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae, ed. W.M. Lindsay, 2 vols., (Oxford: 1911), I.xxxvii 23 & 26, II.xxi. 41; and Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Documentum de Modo et Arte Dictandi et Versificandi, trans. Roger Parr, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: 1968).

62. Cited in Russell and Winterbottom, *op. cit.*, 169.

63. See Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, 2nd ed., (Oxford: 1952), passim, for a good general discussion of medieval biblical exegesis.

some kinds of vernacular literature."⁶⁴ Certainly by Henryson's age literary productions of all sorts were open to the extraction of a multiplicity of meanings which qualified as allegorical interpretations.

Even a casual reading of the Morall Fabillis reveals a variety of symbolic approaches in the moralitates, in the terms expounded by Dante. The first level, the literal, as Henryson suggests himself, is inapplicable to fables in which animals are depicted as rational creatures capable of speech. The second, allegorical, level of meaning, according to Dante, "is a truth hidden under a beautiful fiction"--the chief argument Henryson uses in his "Prologue." All three extra-literal levels are in a general sense allegorical; and, as they interact in pointing up symbolic lessons, it occasionally proves difficult to distinguish clearly between them. At the least, however, the allegorical level may be taken to indicate a simple figurative equation or equations. For example, in The Sheep and the Dog, Henryson presents a straightforward interpretive equation: "This selie scheip may present the figure / Of pure commounis, that daylie ar opprest" (1258-59; my italics); and so on with other animal characters, without attempting to extrapolate any deeper meaning from his story than political satire. His terms are those of earthly reality; and he does not call on men generally to correct anti-social and self-destructive faults or guide their steps toward acceptance in Heaven. Although Henryson takes an ethical position, especially in the sheep's prayer for relief, his moralitas is at a basic level only allegorical, and not also tropolog-

64. MacQueen, Allegory, op. cit., 49-56. For convenience, I cite MacQueen's translation (pp. 56-57) of Il Convivio in the following paragraphs. I am aware that I am taking a great liberty in simplifying and applying these concepts to Henryson, perhaps as much liberty as that Dante took in expanding the Aquinine concepts of exegetical criticism to include vernacular literature.

ical or anagogical.

"The third sense," as Dante explained, "is called moral; and this sense is that for which teachers ought as they go through writings intently to watch for their own profit and that of their hearers." This sense might be called the moral lesson proper, a message intended to guide men to right conduct. The canticle-like moralitas of The Two Mice, for instance, is tropological, varying a theme which exhorts its hearers--Henryson's "Freindis" and peers (365)--to seek material contentment ("Blyithnes in hart with small possessioun," 396). Although the implied spiritual choice between the things of God and Mammon colours his message, his moral specifically concerns itself with conduct in this life.

Finally, Dante notes, "the fourth sense is called anagogic, that is, above the senses; and this occurs when a writing is spiritually expounded, which even in the literal sense by the things signified likewise gives intimation of higher matters belonging to the eternal glory." When a moralitas "looks to Heaven"⁶⁵--that is, points toward the salvation of souls--we may regard it as anagogic. The "gude morall edificatioun" (1893) of The Preaching of the Swallow, for example, while allegorical in equating the Carll with "the feind," the Swallow with "the halie preichour," and so on, essentially concerns itself with the means to salvation, an anagogic interpretation. Earthly matters do not enter into it except insofar as behaviour and thought promote or destroy spiritual salvation.

This mixture of allegorical levels of interpretation is common in the Morall Fabillis. Few fables are simple allegories, straightforward

65. St. Thomas Aquinas' Theological Texts, trans. Thomas Gilby, (Oxford: 1955), 22.

in their interpretation: The Sheep and the Dog (a multivalent political satire, criticizing both ecclesiastical and civil legal abuses); The Lion and the Mouse; and The Wolf and the Lamb. It is no accident that all three of these fables are seriously satiric, and earth-bound in outlook by urging legal and political reforms. Most of the moralitates, whether concerned with social or spiritual themes, are complex, at least two-tiered allegories, with one level receiving emphasis. The Cock and the Fox, The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger, and The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman, for example, receive both allegorical and especially tropological interpretations; and Henryson expounds both tropological and anagogical meanings in The Fox and the Wolf. In two of the fables, The Cock and the Jasp and The Paddock and the Mouse, one may argue for the presence of all three levels of meaning in the moralitates. The jasp "betakinnis perfite prudence and cunning" (128) and the mouse "the saull of man betakin may in deid" (2949), allegorical similitudes; the recollection of the virtues and profit of "science" (134-40), and the exhortation to eschew the company of fair-tongued villains and to cherish liberty (2911-33), constitute tropological messages; and both fables discuss spiritual "appetite" in terms of salvation and damnation ("To mannis saull [science] is eternall meit," 140,⁶⁶ "carnall lust be the suggestioun / Quhilk drawis ay the saull and druggis doun," 2953-54), interpretations which may be viewed as anagogic.

Yet some moralitates--complex but still presenting only a partial view--are perplexing in that the interpretation of a character or act

66. The divine meaning is mentioned but relatively undeveloped in The Cock and the Jasp; the argument for an anagogic interpretation present in the fable's moral is therefore more tenuous.

comes as a surprise, even an unpleasant shock, to the reader. As this is a feature to which critics have devoted much attention (and often justification),⁶⁷ I shall not belabour it. Briefly, on first reading, there seems to be an uncomfortable discrepancy between one's sympathetic response to a character and the moral evaluation of that character according to the poet. In effect, we regard the character only in terms of their animal natures, ignoring any human equivalencies. The poet is able to exploit the ambiguous nature of fable characters. The cock of The Cock and the Jasp seems to be practical and reasonable, even sage, in rejecting the inedible jewel; it is a logical act in terms of a real cock. Yet we are told he is appetite-ridden and "may till ane fule be peir" (142). Noble in The Trial of the Fox wins our approval by attempting to restore justice and peace to his realm; yet he is "the warld by liklyname" (1104), a negative symbol of transience, Fortune-like deceit and instability, and false values. And in The Wolf and the Wether, the wether, from laudable motives, undertakes an impossible and necessary task which he fulfils admirably until fatally over-reaching himself in the heat of the moment. Yet he is condemned as a proud, "presumptuous" fool who fails to know himself (2591-2611), an example of ignoble social-climbing. The tyrannous wolf, pitiless representative of the noble class, is all but ignored. In each case, our emotional response to the characters seems to be at odds with their intellectual significance.

67. One of the most perceptive appraisals of this device is by I.W.A. Jamieson, in two articles: "Henryson's The Taill of the Wolf and the Wedder," SSL, 6 no. 4 (April 1969), 248-57; and "'To preue thare preiching to a poesye'," Parergon, 8 (April 1974), 24-36. See also Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature, (Edinburgh & London: 1958), 40; Denton Fox, "Henryson's Fables," op. cit., 343; MacQueen, Robert Henryson, op. cit., 106-110; and Clark, op. cit., 4-6.

But this discrepancy is apparently deliberate, a device, as Ian Jamieson puts it, "where the reader is purposely involved in sympathy with the fool, only to be shown his folly in the *moralitas*; the reader then returns to the tale to find hints of criticism which, because of his initial sympathy, he had not recognized."⁶⁸ The characters' faults are plain enough, but only retrospectively. Heretofore, responding to the fables' external events and the logic of earthly reality, we had more or less approved of the characters, in effect sinning with them by accepting their values. We feel emotionally betrayed, and are shocked to discover ourselves condemned.

I suggest that this is a kind of serious allegorical irony. It is possible that a sophisticated medieval audience--more familiar with fable traditions and attuned to stylistic devices as well as iconographic signals--may not have suffered this surprise to quite the same extent as modern readers. But, assuming this effect to be intended, I would argue that Henryson's jarring discrepancies--achieved by interpretive omission, by giving a situation only one of several possible explanations, or by confining the allegory to a single level--are part of a deliberate strategy of irony. This strategy makes a highly complex and subtle use of narrative surprise, incongruity, and comic misdirection. Because the cock's ideas are practical, full of common sense, and argue for the stability of the social hierarchy ("Quhair suld thow sit, bot on ane kingis croun, / Exalt in worschip and in grit honour?" 108-109), we expect the cock to be praised, and that the *moralitas* would be the same as in Lydgate's version of the fable. Instead, reversing expectations, the jewel leaves the "real" world alto-

68. "Robert Henryson," op. cit., 277-78; for further explorations of "shock" *moralitates*, see pp. 46-58, 72, 222-23, and 238.

gether and becomes pure symbol, an emblem of "science"; in this light, the cock's rejection of knowledge and spiritual wisdom damns him for his worldly allegiance and spiritual blindness, and this occurs for sympathetic readers as well, in like manner spiritually blind. This temporal-spiritual shift in perception creates the incongruous tension of allegorical irony.

In the other two moralitates singled out, as elsewhere in the Morall Fabillis, Henryson consistently involves the readers in the worldly values and aspirations of the animal characters (man as beast) only to destroy approval of those values by implying or imposing a higher ethical vision. The incongruity of thwarted expectations constitutes an ironic surprise which shocks us initially but which we come to view with pleasure and approval (if not delight) once we have been made to perceive Henryson's higher vision of reality. Henryson's ironic surprises reinforce his lessons perhaps more effectively than his simple fulfilments of our expectations. Nothing worldly escapes censure. All social activity, except in a few specifically political satires,⁶⁹ is simply a guide to posthumous rewards. The fables as a whole often act to comment ironically on readers who have unwittingly admired, approved of, or emotionally identified with character who represent the false world, the Devil and his agents, and foolish trusters in Fortune.

The device of limited interpretation, shaping our apprehension of the fables, points toward a related kind of irony: ironic omission. By this I mean instances where Henryson ignores or omits to treat directly in his commentary satiric themes present in the tales themselves. Few fables--usually anagogically-biased, such as The Preaching of the

69. Even these fables are concerned with sin.

Swallow or The Paddock and the Mouse--fail to carry any critical social commentary; and three fables, as mentioned, are solely concerned with political satire. The most straightforward fables are also the most serious in tone. Ironical omissions occur in the comic fables. There are comic anti-feminist elements from the fabliau tradition in The Cock and the Fox. Anti-mendicant satire emerges in the portrait of Freir Wolf Waitskaith; and anti-clericalism, again represented by the wolf, in The Trial of the Fox. Bourgeois values, embodied by the proud, nouveau riche town mouse, are examined and found wanting. The government and the court are satirized in The Trial of the Fox; and judicial bribery is explored in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman, wherein the wolf, as in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger, represents the rapacious landed gentry. Yet each of these satiric strokes receives no mention in their fables' respective moralitates. No estate of the social order is immune from censure for folly and selfish abuses; but that censure is implicit, left at the "literal" level of the fables, where terrestrial matters are of greatest concern. Social judgment does not seem to be the poet's prerogative. Ironically, blame-fixing instead falls to those who recognize these elements as satiric; that is, to a sophisticated and knowing audience, readers already able to see beyond the literal depiction of events. It is irony that depends on a shared superior vision, a tacit collusion between author and auditor.

This ironic method has several uses. First, it allows Henryson to offer social criticism while concentrating our attention on higher ethical and spiritual issues. The fable world is at times patterned specifically on Scottish society, but more generally mirrors society and its flaws and vices throughout Europe, and so can be bent toward

both particular and universal satiric application. Second, Henryson can avoid parochialism by not being too specific. None of his topical satiric references are made particular, though we presume these would have been recognized by his contemporaries. He names no names, and even an "obvious" identification of James III with Noble the lion must remain tentative. Finally, Henryson's ironic, eloquent omissions allow him to escape the presumptuous fault of Coppok, that of (blasphemously) pronouncing judgment upon his fellow creatures. He leaves it to his auditors to pass judgment if they choose. In place of indignation and condemnation he uses irony as silent commentary on the problems of his society.

Henryson's satires encompass the full range of social concern and spiritual awareness, embracing every aspect of human existence. His, therefore, is a cosmic as well as humanitarian vision: he is as worried for all men in this life as he is for Everyman in the next.

Much has been made of Henryson's unusual "democratic" defence of the oppressed commonfolk.⁷⁰ But his championship of the poor forms only part of a larger vision of social harmony. His satiric perception is a highly conservative one, arguing for the preservation of the hierarchical arrangement of society. Each of the Three Estates, holding ordained and necessary relationships to one another, has a duty to maintain its responsibilities to every other. Good government and social order depend on a just interaction of all the Estates; all provide various particular services in exchange for the powers and privi-

70. Compare, for example, Marshall W. Stearns, Robert Henryson, (New York: 1949), 106-110; or Wittig, op. cit., 51.

leges each enjoys. Henryson's social satire often calls attention to misgovernment, instances of legal corruption and tyrannous injustice, and other abuses of power. (Power, after all, can only be abused by those who possess it; and not surprisingly the upper classes--with the greatest stake in worldly success--come in for the greatest share of criticism.) Yet Henryson equally condemns breaches of social order in the lower classes, notably pretentious social-climbing (The Two Mice; The Wolf and the Wether) but also the commoners' "presumptuous" disdain of a weak nobility (The Lion and the Mouse, 1428-60). Every member must operate within the bounds of justice and integrated social convention. Henryson sides with the commoners, but only so long as they are in their proper place as well as morally in the right when suffering abuse from above. Protecting the common good, he wields satire as a weapon for maintaining the fabric of society intact.

But the vices and follies Henryson castigates are not merely anti-social, they are damnable. Henryson's spiritual satire is likewise "democratic"--all souls are equal before the throne of God--and ideologically conservative. Because the consequences of a brief bad life on earth are eternal and not transient, his tone in regard to Everyman (frequently represented by the smallest and weakest creatures, mice and birds) is pervasively tragic. Matthew P. MacDiarmid feels that Henryson--unlike Dante--shows a "neo-Boethian concern for hell and its tormented denizens," and that "a sympathetic horror is plainly felt by the Scottish poet for a hell that is reached with such terrible ease."⁷¹

71. MacDiarmid, "Robert Henryson in His Poems," in Bards and Makars, ed. A.J. Aitken, et al, (Glasgow: 1977), 27-40. His article is essentially designed to question Denton Fox's view of Henryson's world as "perfectly organized" and establishing "the ontological superiority of God without denying the reality of ordinary experience" ("Henryson's Fables," op. cit., 355). Yet pitying those in

Yet I would disagree that Hell is easily reached: Hell, like Heaven, must be earned. The point that Henryson consistently emphasizes--and this is especially true of the comic fables, such as The Fox and the Wolf--is that a man has the knowledge of his actions' consequences, and the power to choose the righteous life. The fox by intuition, the birds preached to by the swallow, and the mouse who knows physiognomy are all clearly forewarned; yet each selfishly succumbs to his appetite. The tragedy is that they habitually choose this world above the next, falling to temptation by taking what appears to be the easy option, and so perished damned. Those creatures who are most admirable (or enviable) in a worldly sense--the rational, the powerful, the witty--are frequently those in greatest spiritual danger. The masters of the world are the tyrannous, unjust, appetite-governed characters who embody various of the Seven Deadly Sins. When Lowrence succeeds in his tricks, as in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger and in The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman, he represents either "this world" (2219) or "the Feind" (2431). Indeed, among the comic fables, the contemplative mare alone enjoys an unblemished "worldly" success, but only in the act of rejecting the world (as represented by the court). The satire inevitably demands that we consider the eternal as well as the temporal consequences of any belief or action.

The Morall Fabillis, as Henryson promises in the "Prologue" (3-7), are dulce et utile: they provide a valuable recreation of the mind which avoids spiritual sloth, the basic classical and medieval justification of entertaining fiction. Taken as a whole, the Morall Fab-

Hell, as MacDiarmid suggests of Henryson (p. 33), amounts to disagreeing with the judgment which placed them there, a notion I have difficulty accepting in Henryson's work despite the several "God is gane to sleip" references in regard to human injustice.

illis offer an elevating vision that is comprehensive and consistently anagogical, even in those satires which appear to be merely political. In fact, the serious moral purpose of each of Henryson's major poems is to "look to Heaven," and they all may be broadly described as "comedies" in the Christian sense of the term. The Testament of Cresseid, hinting at the final redemption of Cresseid, celebrates caritas and condemns vain worldly values. Orpheus and Eurydice likewise decries sensual affections and those ignorant souls "affetterit in this warldis vane plesance / And bussines of temporalite" (601-604), praying that men might find the "grace to stand / In parfytte lufe" (631-32). These anagogical themes persist in a number of the minor poems as well. All of his major poems are exemplary fictions which lead men to divine wisdom, pointing away from mere transitory values and so toward eternal salvation. But all of the Morall Fabillis, whether tragic or risible, consciously depend on the many interrelated varieties of irony. Not only is the tragic vision poignantly heightened through incongruity, this gives the humorous fables the added dimension of being double comedies. They are literally funny and morally delightful, comic fictions which bring the reader to joyous spiritual awareness.

Henryson, as a humorous storyteller, is then an ironic moralist rather than a satirist dependent on open ridicule. His comic emphasis falls on contextual ironies, the incongruities involved in his characters' avoidable self-betrayals; and his humour grows out of a fully "human" character development--sympathetic, universal (i.e. non-particular, non-exemptive), yet also wry and sardonic. Despite the emphasis on foolish wit and plain folly, and the abundance of ridiculous characters, there is a remarkably even balance between the laughter of superiority and the laughter of incongruity evoked by the Morall Fab-

illis. We would expect superiority laughter to be predominant, as it is within the fables themselves; and indeed we frequently laugh at the vices, follies, expectations, and absurdities of the fables' sinful actors. But because Henryson relies on covert satire and on a multiplicity of ironic levels and methods--broadly in plot development and interpretive disparities, particularly in wit and other varieties of verbal humour--much incongruous laughter is also present. Irony is a superior vision in part because it encompasses sensitivity to incongruities. Further, Henryson often makes his sinning beasts either sympathetic like the mice and sheep or roguishly attractive like the fox, so even as we laugh at them inevitably we laugh at ourselves as well. This strategy results in a curious double-edged quality in many situations of superiority laughter. The fables are intended to instruct, and therefore the reader is not expected to escape self-ridicule. Yet, happily, the reader is not expected to suffer the poet's scorn into the bargain.

Chapter Three

SCOTTISH FABLIAUX

A general discussion of the French and English fabliau traditions is in order before examining the extant Middle Scots fabliaux and fabliau-like verse narratives.¹ Fabliaux may be simply defined as humorous short stories in verse;² originally a French genre, they are loosely allied to but distinct from such non-courtly, "traditionally humorous and lightly didactic"³ forms as beast epics and fables, mime, secular plays, and a variety of comic or satiric poems. Descended from the humour galois of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, fabliaux were intended for public recitation rather than singing or silent read-

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1. In the following discussion of fabliaux I am generally indebted to Joseph Bédier, Les Fabliaux, 5th ed., (Paris: 1925); Per Nykrog, Les Fabliaux, 2nd ed., (Geneva: 1972); and Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition, (Berkeley, California: 1957), esp. pp. 58-71. Also useful were Walter M. Hart, "The Narrative Art of the Old French Fabliaux," in Kittridge Anniversary Papers, (New York: 1913), 209-216; Robert Hellman and Richard O'Gorman, Fabliaux, (London: 1965), 182-88; T.B.W. Reid, Twelve Fabliaux, (Manchester: 1958), ix-xiv; R.C. Johnson and D.D.R. Owen, Fabliaux, (Oxford: 1957), v-xxiii; and Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, trans. Willard Trask, (Princeton, New Jersey: 1953), 208-212. Examples of French fabliaux refer to the collected edition by A. de Montaiglon and G. Raynaud, Recueil Général et Complet des Fabliaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles, 6 vols., (Paris: 1872-90).
 2. Roy J. Percy, "Structural Models for the Fabliaux and the Summoner's Tale Analogues," Fabula, 15 (1974), 103-113, adds the distinction: "Fabliaux...are narratives in which the narrative sequence is established for the purpose of humorous effect, and humorous works in which the humour is realizable only through narrative sequence. Such a definition excludes stories which are only incidentally humorous--because they have humorous passages, grotesque characters, a parodic relationship to some other narrative form (e.g. La Flamenca, Speculum Stultorum, Sir Thopas)--and humorous pieces which are non-narrative or only incidentally narrative" (p. 105).
 3. Muscatine, op. cit., 58.

ing; were written as independent compositions rather than forming part of a collection or fitted into a narrative framework; and were told for their own sake with the intention of provoking laughter in an audience. Pervasive "realism"--actions, characters, and scenes drawn from everyday experience, "and a remarkable preoccupation with the animal facts of life"⁴--is generally acknowledged to be the most characteristic trait of the fabliaux; although some fabliaux embrace supernatural and Christian supernatural elements (such as fairies and werewolves, but most often devils and saints interfering in mortals' affairs). And despite the fact that the vast majority of French fabliaux are concerned with sex as a central theme, in the canon of 151 fabliaux accepted by Bédier "95 contain some kind of explicit moral and only 46 do not."⁵ That is, more than sixty percent of the surviving tales purport to offer its audience an exemplary lesson.

The French fabliaux flourished as a genre from the thirteenth century until roughly the death of the last known fabliard, Jean de Condé, in 1346; although the subject matter and fabliaux style continued on in the farce, which was also generally composed in octosyllabics. Written by a wide diversity of largely anonymous authors of varying concerns, temperaments, and abilities, the fabliaux exhibit little unity of conception and aim when viewed as a whole:

The subject matter, purpose, and tone of the fabliaux that have been preserved are enormously at variance. They represent the product of many authors, known and unknown, or various classes and social situations. And they span four or five generations which witnessed profound social, economic, and literary changes. Some fabliaux are comprehensible only from the vantage point of the aristocracy, others from that of the merchant class.... It is clear that the fabliaux can-

4. Muscatine, *ibid.*, 59.

5. Johnson and Owen, *op. cit.*, xiv.

not be assigned to a single social milieu.⁶

In fact, it is difficult to generalize about fabliaux. All social classes appreciated and contributed to the fabliaux: they were not solely the product of jongleurs and itinerant clerks for the amusement of the rising bourgeoisie, but were composed by all types of people and acceptable in all places that people gathered, even the religious houses. Though many fabliaux are set squarely in a middle class scene, some fabliards utilize (and presuppose a knowledge) of the tenets of amour courtois (e.g. The Lai of Aristotle, MR.V.243); others parody, satirize, or poke gentle fun at those conventions (e.g. William and the Falcon, MR.II-92). There is even evidence, in the two extant versions of Berenger Longbottom (MR.III.252 and IV.57), of deliberate tailoring to an audience by the careful expurgation of class prejudice.⁷ The range of literary skill and comic purpose is likewise great, and fabliaux differ in length, subject matter, and the quality of humour. As narratives they range from situational mimetic transcripts--the crude telling of a simple dirty joke--to complex stories with elemental character development; and in humour range from cruel tricks, grotesquerie, slapstick, broad and bawdy mirth to parody, satire, and urbane wit. The fabliaux derive from a variety of sources, such as folktales and the oral tradition, wisdom literature, the Disciplina Clericalis of Petrus Alphonsus, and even, apparently, true stories.⁸

6. Hellman and O'Gorman, op. cit., 184. Reid, op. cit., xii, notes that the fabliaux are recognized for a "matter-of-fact, realistic, and often cynical current of thought which is generally associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie." I think it is more accurate to include in that concept the decline in power of the haut courtois and the gradual decay of chivalric ideals.

7. Hellman and O'Gorman, *ibid.*, 184. .

8. *Ibid.*, 184. See their discussion of Frere Denise (MR.III.263).

Nevertheless, though fabliaux encompass a wide variety of "humorous short stories in verse," we are able to make some general statements about them. The dominant concern of the fabliard was to make his audience laugh. Thus, the comic narrative itself was of primary importance, and all elements of it were subordinated to humorous ends. Fabliaus, then, tend to be brief and non-complex in plot, relatively stationary of scene (the domestic interior in most cases), "observant of the unities,"⁹ peopled with stock character types who have stereotyped reactions to events (most of whom pursue lives controlled by one or more of the Seven Deadly Sins, chiefly luxuria), propelled forward at a lively pace by comic action and dramatically conceived, vigorous, colloquial dialogue. The tone of the narrator is usually the same as the characters of his story.¹⁰ This "blunt economy of plan and procedure"¹¹ and lack of self-consciousness about style, technique, and subject matter, is symptomatic of the comedic utilitarianism governing the fabliards. Compared to the formal, rhetorical romances and allegories of the haut courtois, fabliaux are reactionary (often lending themselves to satire and parody of courtly conventions). Anaphora and personification are almost entirely absent,¹² as are set descriptions (effectio and descriptio), editorial commentaries by the narrator, and inner monologues, all elements of the "courtly" style.¹³ Action is the fabliau keynote, and digressions and descriptions are rare and brief, always to comic purpose. Details are introduced piecemeal,

9. Hart, op. cit., 209.

10. Auerbach, op. cit., 211.

11. Muscatine, op. cit., 59.

12. Reid, op. cit., xii.

13. Muscatine, op. cit., 65.

as they are required to clarify the action; and so it is with characters and characterizations: nothing is added unless it somehow serves the plot.¹⁴ Dialogue is heavily relied on to forward the action, full of popular jargon, obscenity, and epithets: "the common speech of the people...thoroughly paratactic, with lively questions and exclamations, full, and indeed over full, of popular terms of expression...[and] sensory vividness, giving a graphic picture of the situation through the most unpretentious means and most everyday words."¹⁵ Fabliaux give the impression of inexhaustible liveliness primarily through dialogue.

Fabliaux explore a diversity of themes. Most appeal unashamedly to elemental, baser passions, usually provoking a laugh "at the expense of traditional morality."¹⁶ The scenes are predominantly domestic and middle class, and the "eternal triangle"--jealous husband, lecherous wife, and her adulterous lover--is by far the most common subject of the fabliaux. Of the 147 "themes" adduced by Nykrog, 106 are erotic and only 41 are non-erotic; and of the 106 erotic themes, 42 are triangles, in which the husband is outwitted by a comfortable two-to-one margin.¹⁷ Fabliaux are stocked with characters representing an ample cross-section of medieval society--only the very highest ranks seem immune from depiction--usually introduced with a bare, formulaic description of the "type" of character presented (comely wives, fat priests, jealous husbands, and so on). The stock figures of the eternal triangle, reappearing "so often as to have an almost a priori

14. Muscatine, pp. 60-62.

15. Auerbach, p. 211.

16. Hellman and O'Gorman, p. 187. This of course assumes an orthodox morality--frequently the teachings of the Church--against which to view the behaviour of fabliau characters.

17. Nykrog, op. cit., 155.

status,"¹⁸ are the most common types. Central to these adulterous intrigues are the winsome and invariably treacherous wives,¹⁹ regarded as "necessary evils, who, left unguarded for a moment, will bring shame on their husbands."²⁰ Their infidelity was treated with a certain degree of sympathy as marriage, very often arranged without the female's consent even in the middle classes, was considered a trap for women. They naturally sought love of their own and to escape from the the brutal confines of their jealous mates. But they were also depicted as worthy descendents of Eve, clever, grasping, conniving, faithless vixen with insatiable sexual appetites. The wives were regarded ambivalently, and could be seen as noble, ignoble, or a mixture of both. As a rule they are married to churlish, illiberal, jealously confining men who are born gulls and cuckolds. Occasionally a husband catches and punishes would-be lovers, but there is a decided class bias about who succeeds and who fails in affaires d'amour. The lusty and clever clerk, and the odd knight errant, invariably succeed in fabliau love, while the bourgeois husbands and priest-lovers turn out to be the losers; the bourgeois but love-ennobled wives fall somewhere in between. There exists a rigid, hierarchical relationship: clerks and knights outwit husbands (and occasionally the wives into the bargain); in purely domestic terms wives best their husbands; and husbands and priest-lovers are on a par, sometimes one triumphing, sometimes the other (and where the wife is caught with her priest, she too may suffer). It has been assumed that many of the fabliaux were written by

18. Muscatine, pp. 69-70.

19. Male philandering, a sanctioned commonplace of society, was not a subject of humour unless the lover is discomfited by his affairs.

20. Hellman and O'Gorman, p. 188.

clerks, this accounting for the clerks' inordinately high success rate and general good press, and the low esteem held by their rivals, the priests:

Dans les intrigues érotiques [les clercs écoliers] sont le seul groupe social qui ne souffre jamais de deboires; un clerc amant sort victorieux de toute rencontre, et seule sa dame peut le faire souffrir.... Dans les rôles non érotiques, ils sort toujours vainqueur, et il est alors partout le farceur malicieux que mène l'intrigue. Un clerc jamais dénigré dans un fabliau. Il peut pauvre, et même misérable, mais il est toujours gai et plein de ressources, et il met son invention au service du goût inextinguible et sans vergogne qu'il a pour la bonne chère et les belles filles.... Le clerc a ses vertus bien à lui, et il est depourvu de tous les vices qui deparent les autres classes sociales.

Les prêtres séculiers sont, par contre, les bêtes noires des fabliaux...qu'on amour ils jouissent du douloureux privilège d'une issue régulièrement catastrophique. [Et] si l'affaire finit mal pour les amants--c'est à dit, pour l'amant, car c'est toujours lui qui reçoit la punition--on si seulement l'affaire est découverte sans remède, l'amant est toujours un prêtre.²¹

Fabliau priests, lechers who fail and who alone of all the participants suffer, make miserable lovers. Priests often play "the part of the victim of the comic intrigue, owing his downfall more frequently to the wife than to the husband. And if he escapes he has to thank her cleverness rather than his own."²² In later years the mendicant orders came to share equally the low despicability attributed to the secular clergy (e.g. Boccaccio's Il Decamerone, the Burgundian collection Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles).

Humorously set up against a backdrop of conventional morality, the subjects and characters portrayed in fabliaux are often very earthy, giving precedent to the notorious reputation of fabliaux as being crude and coarse. Their farcical, low comic concerns of course cannot be

21. Nykrog, pp. 132-33, 62.

22. Hart, op. cit., 211.

denied, but it is important to bear in mind that it was an earthy age. The "preoccupation with the animal facts of life" is a general trait of medieval humour, by no means restricted to fabliaux. It was an age in which the audience "feared neither the word nor the thing it designated."²³ And, as Nykrog has rightly pointed out, fabliau immorality is remarkably orthodox: in half of the fabliaux the poet "passes over the situation rapidly and uses a euphemism proper to courtly language"; fabliau bawdiness, though frank, strictly avoids perversions (homosexuality and sexual deviations) and titilating prurience; and obscenity was used for its shock value, for what is obscene today was obscene then.²⁴ Wholly non-gratuitous, taboo words and situations were used for humorous effect; "dirtiness" and arousing erotic interest are out of the question. The bawdiness of fabliau subject matter and treatment is strictly designed to elicit laughter, the chief aim of the fabliard.

Virtue and piety, fit subjects for sermons and saint's legends and able to evoke a particular kind of joy, are not in themselves funny even when subverted. What is needed is the contrast between the desired ideal and the realities of human failings, the conflict between virtue and self-indulgence, piety and eschatological heedlessness. In absolute terms, most of the characters represented in the fabliaux are evil and frequently stupid, as in the fable world. But we are encouraged to forget the absolute and adopt "a sense of superiority, moral, intellectual, or both, over the characters who seem to

23. Hellman and O'Gorman, p. 186.

24. Nykrog, op. cit., 209-213, and 219, who also points out that mere obscenity was no impediment to the courtly style. Most instances of obscenity, surprisingly, appear in non-erotic contexts.

be lifelike and neighborly."²⁵ In order to laugh at fabliau characters the audience must be unbothered by any sympathy for them. Much of the laughter sought by the fabliards is based on cruelty, often pain; treachery, deformity, poverty, stupidity, mutilation, and even death are the subjects of humour. The audience must not laugh guiltily, and those fabliaux which fail fall flat because the audience is allowed to sympathize with the victim.²⁶ The successful fabliaux subvert audience sympathy, or at least help suppress it, by showing the poetic justice of a victim's fate, and even moralizing: proud men are humiliated, the greedy robbed, "clever" husbands outsmarted, gluttons starved, lechers beaten (or adulterers castrated, or killed), and so on.

Because fabliaux presuppose a moral standard against which to view the failings of its characters, stay within the limits of "orthodox" immorality, and rely on a sense of poetic justice to quash our misgivings about laughing at others' pains, we should not be too surprised to find fabliards attempting to eke out a moral lesson for their audience in order to lend further legitimacy to their efforts. After all, "there was a persistent tendency in medieval literature to extract a lesson from any tale, the moral plane being the third on which a work could be judged, after the literal and allegorical meanings had been deduced."²⁷ Bedier (p. 34) rejected contes moraux as an alternative

25. Hart, p. 210.

26. It is extremely difficult to estimate what medieval audience reaction would have been, as indeed it was a cruel age, and necessarily I have made a post-Romantic judgment. But compare Boccaccio's Decameron, trans. G.H. McWilliam, (Harmondsworth, England: 1972), 8th day, 7th Novelle, 620-21: "Though the ladies shook with laughter...they would have laughed even more if the people who had stolen his pig not relieved him also of his capons, which made them feel sorry for him."

27. Johnson and Owen, op. cit., xiv.

definition for some of the fabliaux, but the fact remains that a large number of the surviving fabliaux are supplied with some kind of moral point:

Deux fabliaux sur trois se terminent par une leçon; elle peut prendre la forme d'un proverbe, elle peut être introduite par une formule vague ou, ce qui est le plus fréquent, elle peut désigner le conte comme un "exemple" propre à illustrer certaine idée.²⁸

Many times the reader is left to draw his own conclusions from the story. But though epigrammatic, proverbial, or even "mock-moral" lessons conclude many tales,²⁹ all too often the "matter" of the epilogue gives the appearance of being a useless appendage. The moral element can be organic with the tale, but frequently it is surprising, the moral being unwarranted, forced, or absurdly inappropriate, so that the fabliau moral "often has the air of being imposed by the author as a sort of obligation."³⁰ Theories vary as to why exactly this obligation was felt--perhaps the close kinship with Aesopic and other fables, popular competition with ecclesiastical exempla, the habit of mind of the age--but the fact remains that many of the fabliards saw no incongruity in appending a moral message to joyously bawdy stories. Among the fabliaux attempting to relate a moral meaning, the best are those in which the tale and its purported lesson--moral or otherwise (e.g. folk wisdom)--are successfully integrated.

The English fabliau tradition, for the most part dependent on French models and largely embodying the characteristics of French fab-

28. Nykrog, p. 248.

29. Johnson and Owen, p. xiv. Some fabliaux seem to be deliberate attempts to parody scholastic exempla.

30. Nykrog, p. 248; Johnson and Owen, p. xv.

liaux, is late and considerably less extensive. The only true fabliau in English dating from the thirteenth century, when French fabliau was at its height, is Dame Sirip,³¹ a tale seemingly derived from Petrus Alphonsus. The tale of the Penyworþ of Wyt (c. 1330)³² seems to be the only pre-Chaucerian fourteenth century example of the genre to have survived. If vernacular English fabliaux flourished concurrently with the French there is no evidence of it now. Chaucer's fabliaux,³³ written some fifty years after the death of Jean de Condé, are the next oldest English fabliaux to have been preserved.

Chaucer wrote seven fabliaux (including the incomplete "Cook's Tale," which I omit from consideration). With Troilus and Criseyde and several other Canterbury Tales they are generally numbered among his finest works. He was able to invest "the naked fabliau jest with the substance of rather deeper poetry. In his hands the fabliau becomes an art form."³⁴ They represent the greatest number of fabliaux assignable to a single English author.

It is not possible in a short space adequately to enumerate Chaucer's narrative achievements contributing to the genre, and I will confine myself to a few general observations. All of Chaucer's fabliaux, like the French generally, are peopled with bourgeois charac-

31. Early Middle English Verse and Prose, ed. J.A.W. Bennett and G.V. Smithers, 2nd ed., (Oxford: 1968), 77-95. I exclude the Interludium de Clerico et Puella, contemporaneous with Dame Sirip, as it is probably a play fragment and is a recognizable chanson a'aventure.

32. There are better versions of this tale dating from the fifteenth century, alternatively known as How a Merchande Dyd Hys Wyfe Betray: see W. Carew Hazlitt, ed. Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of England, 4 vols., (London: 1864), I, 196-208.

33. The tales are assigned to the Miller, the Reeve, the Cook, the Friar, the Summoner, the Merchant, and the Shipman.

34. Muscatine, p. 199.

ters treated realistically. All of his fabliaux plots turn on trickery and deception. All but The Friar's Tale are indecent intrigues of one variety or another, four of the six tales being "triangle" stories, and of these no husband escapes uncuckolded. All of Chaucer's fabliaux but The Shipman's Tale are used to "answer" another: the Miller "quits" the Knight's romance, the Reeve the Miller's insulting tale, the Summoner feuds with the Friar, and the Merchant bitterly complements the Wife of Bath's fairy tale vision of marriage; and all have a satiric purpose. In each, Chaucer exhibits a legalistic quality, consistently emphasizing poetic justice in the fates of every victim. This both forestalls sympathy for his victims and drives home an exemplary lesson. Chaucer's major contributions to the genre of course lie in his contextual framework, his sense of irony, elaborations of setting, brilliant dialogue, profound characterizations, the use of a full range of rhetorical techniques, and, in a comic vein, concern for psychological verisimilitude. His narrative technique deliberately moves away from the monochromatic obsession with bare comic action in the narratives of the French fabliards, so that his plots are of no more (and often less) importance than the other elements of his story. Chaucer even slows down the pace slightly by expanding the swift-flowing French octosyllabic couplets into English heroic couplets as his metrical medium.

But though Chaucer's brilliant achievements paved the way in English, few followed his lead. The most obvious pseudo-Chaucerian example is the Prologue to the anonymous Tale of Beryn (c. 1460),³⁵ treating the Pardoner's apocryphal adventures with Kit the coquettish

35. The Tale of Beryn, ed. F.J. Furnivall, EETS E.S. 105, (London & Oxford: 1909), 1-24.

tapster. In this attempt to continue the Canterbury Tales, the Pardoner is cheated out of money and a love-liaison with Kit, beaten by her paramour, obliged to sleep in a kennel with a vicious Welsh dog, and forced to escape the hostler at Canterbury in disguise. But little of Chaucer's style or method has rubbed off on the author of the Tale of Beryn. His tone of low buffoonery and reliance on comic action to carry him through is much more akin to the French style than the Chaucerian. And aside from this one example, Chaucer seems to have had almost no influence on the other extant English fabliaux. Almost all non-Chaucerian fabliaux in English emphasize comic action and dialogue, bringing a swift and humorous resolution to their tales. Characterization is minimal; the full use of rhetorical techniques (such as digressions, mixed stylistic levels, or "extraneous" descriptions) is virtually non-existent; and irony and satire are largely accidental by-products of the plot.

Adam of Cobsam's The Wright's Chaste Wife (c. 1461)³⁶ represents a test of the wife's fidelity in which three would-be seducers are tricked, entrapped, and forced to spin wool for their food while in her captivity until they can be shamefully exposed to her loyal husband. Varying the fidelity theme, in the anonymous Lady Prioress and Her Three Suitors (c. 1500)³⁷ a chaste prioress disposes of three noisome suitors by asking them in turn to pose as a corpse, to bear away a corpse for burial, and to pose as a devil. When each for fright fails in his task, they give up their suits of love. Another anonymous fab-

36. The Wright's Chaste Wife, ed. F.J. Furnivall and W.G. Stone, EETS O.S. 12 and 84, (London: 1865). The anonymous ballad "The Friar in the Well" (Child No. 276) is an analogous tale.

37. Lady Prioress and Her Three Suitors, ed. J. Prinz, *Literarhistorische Forschungen*, Nr. 47, (Berlin: 1911), 168-82.

liau, The Tale of the Basin (c. 1500),³⁸ depicts a husband's vengeance on his faithless, shrewish wife and her priest-lover. With the aid of some magic from his brother, the Parson, he traps the lover, the wife, and member of the household in succession, "glued" naked to a chamber-pot or each other. He releases them after shaming them and extracting money from the priest (whose testicles are at hazard), to live in harmony with his wife thereafter. In the anonymous early sixteenth century print A Mery Iest of Dane Hew Munk of Leicestre (STC No. 13257)³⁹ a lecherous monk sets up a tryst with a tailor's wife. She tells her husband, and he accidentally kills Don Hew in outrage when he catches him "at play"; thereafter, Don Hew is "slain" four more times as various people comically try disposing of the body.

Each of the post-Chaucerian fabliaux named above deal with love-relationships.⁴⁰ Unlike Chaucer's French-modelled fabliaux, they are comparatively "clean" (little scatology or non-euphemistic description is employed), and, for "immoral" tales, display a truly remarkable bias for marital fidelity. In none of these tales is extra-marital lechery rewarded (or, in The Tale of the Basin's case, allowed to go unpunished); and in most of the tales the would-be lovers are actually "turned in" by the women themselves and so thwarted in their base de-

38. The Tale of the Basin and The Frere and the Boy, ed. G. Wright, (London: 1836). The pages are not numbered.

39. I use the facsimile of the tale from the series The English Experience, No. 666, (Norwood, New Jersey: 1974).

40. These are all the Middle and Early Modern English fabliaux that treat the more traditionally French themes of love entanglements, aside from a few reworked fabliaux in English ballads ("Queen Eleanor's Confession," "The Boy and the Mantle," and others) which I do not consider here. Even under the broader definition "humorous short stories in verse" there are barely a handful of fabliaux to add to the English canon. Most of what survives comes from a period when the genre was at least fifty years out of fashion.

sires. The wives tell their husbands (Kit tells her paramour; the Lady Prioress can tell no one) and help in tricking the wooers to be rid of them. Even in The Tale of the Basin, the only tale in which the wife is taken in adultery, shamed, and punished, the wife and husband are finally reconciled and live happily ever after.

The French cynical wink at marital infidelity is notably absent. Of the lovers, only Don Hew is killed and the Pardoner beaten. Generally, the unsatisfied lovers suffer little worse than the loss of money, pride, or both; sympathy for them is erased; and their punishments--except Don Hew's penalty--are just, fitted to their crimes. The stories are exemplary in nature. As in each of Chaucer's fabliaux, all these tales end with what seems to be an obligatory prayer to God (as does The Summoner's Prologue). Often they ask that the company listening be sent wives true as the wright's, freedom from care, rest better than Don Hew's, and so forth, lending them an exemplary air even if, in most cases, there is no specific "moral" or lesson drawn. Morally conservative, on the side of right and justice, the percentage of these and other extant non-Chaucerian fabliaux that humorously celebrate fidelity in love and chastity in marriage and as tales act in an exemplary fashion, is notably high, especially considering the small number of tales that have been preserved. For all their diversity, if English fabliaux had to be singled out by a dominant trait it would have to be for their ethical character.

Regrettably few Middle Scots fabliaux are extant, hardly enough to be called a "tradition." If there were considerable numbers of Scottish fabliaux, they have not come down to us. But it is unlikely that there were, for Middle Scots literature flowered relatively late,

and the fabliau genre was by then long out of fashion. The only two Middle Scots works which may unreservedly be labelled "fabliau" are The Freiris of Berwik and The Wyf of Auchtermwchty, both anonymous and the latter at least dating from the mid-sixteenth century. The definition could be stretched to include The Dumb Wife, although it is more of a folktale in ballad stanzas. Fabliaux, or fabliau-like elements, make up some of the individual tales from The Three Prestis of Peblis, The Talis of the Five Bestis, and The Seven Sages of Rome. But because these are components within a larger narrative framework, I exclude them from the present discussion.

Two features are shared by The Freiris of Berwik, The Dumb Wife, and The Wyf of Auchtermwchty. The first is that all three employ materials from the anti-feminist satiric tradition: like most fabliaux, they concern themselves with bourgeois domesticity, and expose the wives variously as faithless, selfish, domineering, and shrewish. Yet each tale, curiously, protects the institution of marriage in its final message.

The second broad relationship is that all three fabliaux are proper stories rather than mimetic transcripts. Each tale represents a complete and unified action growing out of the motives and deeds of the tale's agents. The Freiris of Berwik, interweaving several distinct episodes into a new whole, exhibits the greatest degree of narrative complexity among the three. The transposition or removal of any of the tales' connected episodes results in a disjoined or incomplete story. This is readily apparent in the case of The Dumb Wife, which survives imperfectly in the Maitland Folio. It is obvious from the action as well as from the verse-form that the beginning and at least

one middle section are missing.⁴¹ Though we may guess at the action in the missing portions, the unity of the tale is disrupted. The essential quality of peripeteia is present in all of the tales. Alesone, Symon, and to a greater extent Abbot Johine, variously suffer unexpected reversals of fortune (though Symon's injury is more in the order of a comic mishap); and while they fall from felicity to misery and pain the two Dominican brothers rise to command the action and earn unexpected happiness. The husbandman of The Wyf of Auchtermwchty suffers an extended series of unexpected (comic) reversals culminating in his loss of household mastery; his wife enjoys a corresponding happy reversal to undisputed marital supremacy. In like manner, the husband of The Dumb Wife loses the peace of his household due to his own ill-advised folly, although his progress is less a reversal of fortune as such than an unexpected change from one kind of unhappiness to another, worse kind. His wife passes from the subservient status of chattel to dominance. Anagnorisis accompanies peripeteia in most of the reversals. Alesone, Johine, Symon, the husbandman, and the husband all realize and feel keenly their losses and degradations, just as the friars and the country wife recognize their triumphs. Only the dumb wife, into whose mind we do not see, exhibits no recognition of any change. For these reasons we may describe the extant Middle Scots fabliaux as proper stories.

41. The Maitland Folio, I, 69-70. The Reidpath MS. (II, 65-68) reveals the tale as disunified by sequential disruption. Miscopied, it begins with the seventh stanza and continues on to the end, concluding with the first sixty-eight lines.

i. The Freiris of Berwik⁴²

"Bonus enim frater rarus est cum fenice" --Wyclif

It is curious that the "excellent" fabliau The Freiris of Berwik, which "ranks above all other attempts to continue the tradition of the comic Canterbury Tales,"⁴³ should remain so long and unjustly neglected by modern critics. This neglect seems to be associated with its anonymous authorship. The antiquarian John Pinkerton originally assigned the poem to William Dunbar, without evidence and apparently based on a feeling that this poem "of the rarest quality" was worthy of the mature Dunbar.⁴⁴ Thereafter, though rightly dubious of the ascription of authorship, (usually Scottish) editors and critics of the nineteenth century thought the poem among Dunbar's best, ranking it with his Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo; and a favourable comparison of The Freiris of Berwik with the best of Chaucer's humorous tales was not uncommon.⁴⁵ John Ross's remarks are typical:

If The Freiris of Berwik is not the work of Dunbar, then Scotland has a nameless poet of the same age, who, in comic humour, rich use of invention, knowledge of human nature, skill in arrangement of detail, and charming vivacity of narrative, rivals the author of The Canterbury Tales.⁴⁶

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42. For a discussion of the textual difficulties surrounding the poem, see Appendix A.
43. C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama, (London & Oxford: 1954), 99. The fact that it is one of the only attempts to continue that "tradition" does not diminish the poem's excellence.
44. John Pinkerton, ed. Ancient Scottish Poems, 2 vols., (London: 1786), II, 394-407. Even Pinkerton adds the slightly reservational "if it be his."
45. David Laing, ed. The Poems of William Dunbar, Now First Collected, 2 vols., (Edinburgh & London: 1834), II, 372-90. He provides a good summary of early critical appraisal in his notes to the poem.
46. John M. Ross, Scottish History and Literature, ed. James Brown, (Glasgow: 1884), 206.

These sentiments have not altered in this century.⁴⁷ But Ross's remarks are also typically brief. Though The Freiris of Berwik receives high praise, it also receives short shrift, applauded then dismissed in a paragraph or less. As the tale's attribution to Dunbar was discarded,⁴⁸ its obscurity grew; after the first decade or so of this century critical interest in the tale dropped off markedly, so that mention of it is now rare and cursory. Despite its acknowledged merits, it is as if anonymous authorship automatically doomed the poem to scholarly disregard.

But, irrespective of authorship, The Freiris of Berwik deserves better than relegation to oblivion. The story is ingeniously plotted, beautifully paced, and richly comic; the characters are on the one hand recognizable in the genre and on the other well-motivated and believable in action. The poet displays a keen sense of irony and a fine narrative gift; and his realism, attention to detail, and concern for credibility mark him as a superb craftsman. If I dwell at length on the tale, mine is merely an attempt to redress the balance somewhat against centuries of neglect.

47. George Saintsbury, A Short History of English Literature, (London: 1908), 186-87, sees the poem as "strongly Chaucerian" and "told with the true brio of The Canterbury Tales." Cf. Janet M. Smith, The French Background of Middle Scots Literature, (Edinburgh & London: 1934), 81 and 155; Walter M. Hart, "The Fabliau and Popular Literature," PMLA, 23 (1908), 329-74; and The Cambridge History of English Literature, ed. A.W. Ward and A.R. Wallis, 6 vols., (Cambridge: 1908), II, 254: "The ascription of this piece has been doubted, but there is nothing unworthy of [Dunbar's] metrical art or satiric bent."

48. T.R. Henderson, Scottish Vernacular Literature, 3rd ed., (London: 1910), 278. His disattribution is based on a feeling for Dunbar's style and temperament: The Freiris of Berwik "does not seem to be stamped with the impress of Dunbar's particular genius," etc.

Before I may begin an extended analysis of The Freiris of Berwik, however, an historical digression concerning the mendicant orders is necessary. The mendicant orders and especially the Franciscans for their various failings and public abuses were lowly esteemed and generally reviled in the later Middle Ages, subject to complaint, accusation, and satiric attack. It was indeed a rare bird who had anything good to say of the begging orders. Given the basic elements of the tale's plot--two Dominicans accidentally stumble onto a tryst between an alewife and her Franciscan lover, and, humorously manipulating the situation, manage to enjoy the lover's feast, expelling the Franciscan in a painful and degrading fashion--it is tempting to view all of the religious principals in the light of the long-standing anti-mendicant satiric tradition. Indeed, early critics wrote of "the excellent playfulness of its satire upon the hypocritical and dissolute lives of the monastic [sic] orders";⁴⁹ or, taking into account the element of internecine rivalry, remarked drily in passing "there is at least one passage which suggests that the Dominicans were no better than they should be, no holier than Friar John."⁵⁰ No one would argue for the perfection of any of the fabliau's characters. But I believe that it would be a mistake to regard the poem simply as the successful humiliation of one rascal by another, or that all the mendicants are alike in knavery. On the contrary, the tale becomes a vehicle for ridiculing the second order of mendicant friars, the Franciscan Conventuals, in the person of Friar Johine. By doing so, the Berwick-poet displays deci-

49. Laing, op. cit., II, 376. This critical comment was supplied by Patrick Tytler for Laing's edition of Dunbar's poems.

50. F.J. Snell, The Age of Transition: The Poets, (London: 1905), 92. He is commenting on J. Schipper's theory that "the satire was provoked by jealousy between rival religious communities."

dedly pro-Dominican sympathies. I think an examination of the historical background will facilitate an understanding of the internecine rivalry depicted in the poem.

Little wonder the poem was seen as taking its place with the writings of Langland, Chaucer, and others assailing the character and behaviour of friars. By the last half of the fourteenth century, scarcely one hundred and fifty years after the creation of the first of the mendicants, the wanton and perfidious lifestyles of some members of the begging orders had become a literary commonplace. In England, John Wyclif--following the lead of Richard Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh--is generally credited with beginning an all-out assault on the friars.⁵¹ In a flood of pamphlets written in the early 1380's Wyclif reviled those of the religious life, especially friars: all were confirmed followers of the Antichrist, "poisonous vermin" given to every form of idolatry, heresy, trickery, vice, and corruption. No crime had been left uncommitted by them. They misled the faithful, beguiled young people, seduced women, begged from the poor even when rich themselves, and kidnapped children in order to fill their impious ranks, despoiling the nation of men and money. Wyclif's rabidly vindictive arguments were designed not to correct corrupt elements within the mendicants but to eliminate them altogether.⁵² While not all of his adherents were as radical, Wyclif certainly found no lack of subscribers to his accusations among the moralists, satirists, and reformers of his age.

51. See Dom David Knowles, The Religious Orders in England, 3 vols., (Cambridge: 1957), II, 98-106. On Fitzralph, see pp. 63-64 and 95-97.

52. Ibid., II, 104.

Many of the same accusations are echoed in the verse of William Langland (?1330-?1400). Of all the religious orders it is the friars who excite in him the greatest degree of outrage and indignation. In the 'B'-text of his Vision of Piers Plowman, friars ingratiate themselves among the nobility to obtain favours and luxuries; they displace the parish clergy by luring penitents away from them; they wander everywhere like street musicians, no home safe against their infiltration, no woman safe from their wiles; like the legions of Hell, there is no end to their proliferation.⁵³ Langland's satire, untainted by bitter egoism and the extravagances which mar Wyclif, is all the more powerful.⁵⁴

Langland is not alone among the poets expressing displeasure and disapproval of the friars. "Fals-Semblant," in the Middle English translation of The Romaunt of the Rose, is made to adopt the guise of "an holy heremyte"; and, in a self-damning confession reminiscent of Chaucer's Pardoner, he reveals his methods and hypocritical motives as a begging friar.⁵⁵ The Romaunt's guileless satire condemns the friars for many of the same reasons of self-seeking worldliness as Langland and Wyclif, including, ultimately, "dreadlessness" of God, tantamount to atheism. Near the end of the fourteenth century Pierce the Plowman's Crede appeared, an unrelenting satire in which Pierce, that he might learn his Creed, goes to each of the mendicant orders in succes-

53. William Langland, The Vision of Piers the Plowman, ed. W.W. Skeat, 10th ed. rev., (Oxford: 1923), Passus XX, pp. 262ff.

54. Knowles, op. cit., II, 110.

55. The Romaunt of the Rose and Le Roman de la Rose, A Parallel-Text Edition, ed. Ronald Sutherland, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: 1968), lines 6482-6800. Fals-Semblant's "sermon" is derived largely from William of St.-Amours.

sion. Each order in turn roundly condemns the other three, and in attempting to make a case for itself proves its own order equally reprehensible.⁵⁶ The charges laid against the friars, and the thoroughgoing condemnation of them, follows the common pattern. Even the normally good-natured Chaucer places his friar among the irredeemable personages, such as the Pardoner and Summoner, on the road to Canterbury. Friar Huberd's portrait is the longest in the General Prologue, and richly enumerates those failings commonly complained of in Chaucer's day.⁵⁷ The Wife of Bath, in the opening lines of her tale, notes the lecherous nature of friars. They swarm everywhere "as thikke as motes in the sonne-beem," and through their ubiquitous wanderings have replaced the elves of old:

Women may go now saufly up and doun.
In every bussh or under every tree
Ther is noon oother incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.

(D878-81)

The Summoner's unflattering portrait of Friar John of Holderness greedily making his rounds among the people (D1716-1884, et seq.) adds to the formidable picture of friar impiety and malefaction.

Though the initial indignation like Langland's perhaps abated somewhat, friars remained the butt of satirists' complaints throughout the fifteenth century. Their begging, further impoverishing people already struggling to make a living, continued to arouse the ire of such poets as the author of "God Spede the Plow" (c. 1500):⁵⁸

Then comme the graye Freres and make their mone,
And call for money our soulis to save;

56. Pierce the Plowman's Crede, ed. W.W. Skeat, EETS O.S. 30, (London: 1867).

57. Chaucer, A208-69. See also Knowles, op. cit., II, 113.

58. Edited by Skeat with Pierce the Plowman's Crede, op. cit., 69-74.

Then comme the white Freres and begyn to grone,
 Whete or barley they woll fayne haue;
 Then commeth the freres Augustynes & begynneth to crave
 Corne or chese, for they haue not Inough;
 Then commeth the blak freres which wolde fayne haue--
 'I praye to God, spede wele the plough.'

(49-56)

"Friar" became virtually synonymous with hypocrisy. Their lechery became all but proverbial.⁵⁹ Certain basic features of The Freiris of Berwik seem to identify it with this anti-mendicant tradition.

The satiric theme of anti-mendicancy, with its manifold variations in the popular literary tradition, reflects conflicts raging within the Church almost from the inception of the mendicant orders. Ever whirling in the hurricane of Church controversy, the friars fought with the secular clergy, with the monastic orders, and within their own ranks. Each of the four orders vowed to adhere to the corporate ideals of poverty, chastity, and obedience, admirable ideals perhaps but principles which became increasingly difficult to uphold. Their evangelical poverty forced them to beg and live on charity, a practice that proved neither popular nor "profitable"; and within a short period they began to engage in the more lucrative parochial activities of preaching and hearing confessions, among others, aided by their freedom of movement and ability to grant easy absolution and penance. This competed directly and unfairly with the parish and secular clergy, who found their livings reduced and functions usurped; and a fight over canonical authority ensued. The mendicant emphasis on learning brought the friars into conflict with the monastic orders, who heretofore had exclusively dominated the universities.⁶⁰ In 1274, the Council of

59. Cf. the formulaic "Betuix twa foxis a crawing cok, / Betuix twa freiris A maid in hir smok," etc., in Bannatyne, III, 37.

60. Arnold Williams, "Chaucer and the Friars," Speculum, 28 (1953), 499-513.

Lyons decided against disbanding the mendicant orders, and by 1311 Pope Boniface VIII's bull Super cathedram set definite limits for the friars, but feelings among the ecclesiastics remained high.

The Franciscans, or Friars Minor, seemed especially liable to excite animosity from all quarters: "the Minors were always the mass of ferment at the heart of all controversies," contending, as were the other friars, over the ecumenical issue of canonical authority; moreover, they were torn from within and opposed from without over the issues of corporate poverty and mendicant ethics.⁶¹ In the early fourteenth century the Grayfriars led the opposition to the papacy on the questions of Dominion and Grace, which involved charges of Church avarice, holding that "if possession of material wealth was sinful, churchmen and the papacy above all were among the greatest sinners, and therefore incapable of lordship."⁶² Even more galling, especially to the secular clergy, were Franciscan claims concerning the mystic "Eternal Gospel." By the mid-thirteenth century the Franciscans had climbed out on an apocalyptic limb to proclaim the new age of the Eternal Gospel: just as the "New Law" of the New Testament had replaced the "Old Law" of the Old Testament, so the Eternal Gospel was to supersede the New Law. The Franciscans cast friars in the role of John the Baptist, forerunners of this new age. Their championship of the mystic Eternal Gospel drew the warm counterattacks of Gerard of Abbeville, Nicolas of Lisieux, and the Parisian doctor William of St.-Amours, who, in his mid-thirteenth century treatise De periculis novissimorum temporum (his title derives from 2 Timothy 3:6-7 concerning the deceivers of the last

61. Knowles, op. cit., II, 61-63 and 91.

62. Ibid., 63. It was in the 1340's that Fitzralph, the Archbishop of Armagh, was called upon to defend the papacy.

days) saw the friars as advocates of the Antichrist whose coming was to foretell the end of the world. He lays the perennial charges against them: "'hypocrisy,' the disparity between the boastful profession of absolute poverty and the riches of the friars' clothing, diet, and buildings; their pleasure in the championship of the rich and powerful; and their desires for worldly recognition and fame."⁶³ Many such tracts as De Periculis were brought out later or revived⁶⁴ against the friars, who lapsed further from their ideals in the ensuing years.

It is not surprising therefore to find the Franciscans at odds with the Dominicans. Not only were they competing with the monks and secular clergy, they were also competing with one another. This was to be expected, for despite the different emphases of their orders--the Dominicans stressed learning and preaching, the Franciscans begging and works of the hands--their ideals, constitutions, methods, and territory were by and large the same. Early on there was competition for vocations between them. Each order tried to enlarge its membership, often by encouraging the defection of friars from one order to the other. Both orders sought to prevent the loss of potential members through transfers by restricting the liberties of their novices (through vows, shortened probations, and other means), so that Pope Gregory IX by 1236 "forbade the Dominicans and Franciscans from putting any pressure on novices during their year of probation. But com-

63. Williams, op. cit., 507.

64. Pinkerton, op. cit., II, 398, notes that "the Minors were particularly hated by the clergy. A curious enumeration of their faults occurs in a remarkable Latin pamphlet in [my] possession, printed in Gothic letters in 1490, containing the speech of Richard Archbishop of Armagh against the Minors or Privilegiati."

petition between the two orders remained keen,"⁶⁵ and the practice of restricting transfers, especially among the Dominicans, remained in effect. Papal intervention in other practical matters was attempted as well. Pope Clement IV, recognizing that the amount of alms available in any given community would be limited and therefore competition for those alms would be intense, warned the mendicants against establishing houses too closely to one another.⁶⁶ Berwick, unique among the Scottish burghs, had houses representing all four mendicant orders dating from the thirteenth century.⁶⁷

There was also an element of class rivalry between the two orders as well. It was common practice for the upper classes to grant the family estates to the eldest son by right of primogeniture, and send the second son into religious orders. The Dominicans, first order of the mendicant friars, were frequently the choice of houses entered in such a situation. Peopled very often with members of the nobility, and endowed accordingly, the Dominicans were most often faulted for pride and worldliness. Pierce the Plowman's Crede is typical in its detractions, citing the opulence of the "courtly" Dominican houses, the abundant riches, the fat well-fed friars, and their pride in being first of degree, an important order of pope-makers.⁶⁸ They were class conscious and proud of their exalted membership. The Franciscans, on the other hand, second in degree, were very much more the order of the masses, open to all and sundry, and there was a certain

65. William A. Hinnebusch, The History of the Dominican Orders, 2 vols., (New York: 1966), I, 322.

66. Ibid., 161.

67. Ian B. Cowan and David E. Easson, Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland, 2nd ed., (London & New York: 1976), 116, 125, 136, and 140.

68. See especially lines 155-267.

class friction between the two orders.

Besides rivaling one another in practical affairs, there were substantial differences of opinion between the Dominicans and Franciscans concerning matters of doctrine. The issue involving the meaning of "evangelical poverty" was among their first points of contention, by 1321 taking the form of a fierce scholastic debate as to whether Christ and the Apostles had owned property.⁶⁹ The Dominicans held that corporate ownership of property did not conflict with the ideal of individual poverty. The Franciscans, having in 1279 placed all their possessions under papal control, argued for corporate as well as individual poverty. The debate was ended, in favour of the Dominicans' position, when "in 1332 Pope John XXII sanctioned their interpretation by refusing to remain steward of Franciscan property, as required by the rule of their order."⁷⁰ Predictably enough, this decision led to the increased worldliness of the Franciscans, indeed of all the mendicants, and widespread abuses in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries finally forced Pope Sixtus IV to revoke the laws of corporate poverty altogether in 1475, allowing orders to hold property and have permanent sources of income.⁷¹

There was more, albeit minor, trouble between the two orders in the 1390's over a mystic doctrine of the Eternal Gospel declared by Abbot Joachim of Fiori. In his vision, based in part on the prophecies of Jeremiah, Joachim saw Dominicans as symbols of the raven, because

69. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2nd ed., (Oxford: 1974), 532. See also Knowles, op. cit., II, 62.

70. Williams, op. cit., 502.

71. Cross and Livingstone, op. cit., 417. Sixtus IV's decision did not adversely affect the Dominicans, as education was and remained their chief aim, and corporate poverty was only demanded by the Franciscans, who lived by begging and works of the hands.

the black cappas they wore over their tunics were like the feathers of the raven. The vision naturally went on to exalt the Franciscans, symbols of the dove by virtue of the likeness of the gray Franciscan habit to the dove's gray feathers.⁷² Although Joachim suffered rebuke and punishment, his efforts are indicative of the tensions which persisted between the Friars Major and the Friars Minor.

One major doctrinal conflict came to a head in the latter part of the fifteenth century. From their earliest beginnings the Franciscans had all but made the Blessed Virgin Mary their special province. Since 1219 they had regularly celebrated mass in her honour, and by 1263 introduced the Feast of the Immaculate Conception into the order. John Duns Scotus, declaring in 1309 Deus potuit, Deum decuit, Deus fecit, paved the way for the Franciscans to promote the doctrine of the Blessed Virgin's own immaculate conception in the womb of St. Anne. The Dominicans, following St. Thomas Aquinas's arguments, denied the doctrine. The debate continued heatedly for decades, centering chiefly in Lombardy, but well-known throughout Europe. Finally, after listening to disputations between Dominican Vincent Bandelli and Franciscan Francis Nani in public debate in Rome, Pope Sixtus IV--himself a devout Franciscan and accomplished nepotist--"settled" the issue in favour of the Franciscans in 1477. However, "the personal belief of Sixtus IV did not quell all doubts, nor did opponents of the doctrine cease to preach the contrary to the faithful,"⁷³ and by 1482 there were fresh scandals and charges of heresy on both sides. Sixtus IV put aside the controversies by declaring that excommunication reserved

72. The Very Rev. Raphael M. Huber, A Documented History of the Franciscan Order (1182-1517), (Milwaukee & Washington, D.C.: 1944), 675.

73. Ibid., 433-34.

to the pope would be levied against all those preaching against what was now held by the Church as belief. The noise subsided, but Sixtus IV's declaration did not soon bridge the gulf dividing the defeated Dominicans and triumphant Franciscans on this issue.

Once we have in mind the fabliau tradition, the anti-mendicant literary tradition, and the active Dominican-Franciscan rivalry, we are in a position to examine more fruitfully The Freiris of Berwik. The tale mixes elements of anti-mendicant satire and fabliau humour in a carefully calculated blend. But I will argue that the satire, rather than aimed at all of the friars generally, is specifically anti-Franciscan. That is, Friar Allane and especially Friar Robert are comic heroes, wit-figures; Johine is a figure of ridicule, a comic butt. The Freiris of Berwik is not a saint's legend but a fabliau. As such, we are encouraged to a degree to forget absolute moral standards of behaviour (although moral transgressions in persons of authority and/or publically avowed idealists are funnier than slips in ordinary individuals who have less dignity and no promises to uphold); to be on the look-out for sly innuendo and ironic double entendre at every turning; to applaud roguish brilliance and clever treachery; and to laugh at the punishment inflicted on the naive, the dull-witted, and especially the wicked deserving. In absolute moral terms all of the characters are flawed to varying degrees; but even in absolute terms the Dominicans are better than their Franciscan counterpart. In fabliau terms the Dominicans are admirable clerkly heroes, while Johine is perfectly deserving of victimization. Johine epitomizes both the anti-mendicant satiric tradition and the prêtre amant, the love-failures, of fabliaux. Robert, in his actions, is literally a student from Paris (306)--a clerc écolier in the fabliau tradition--control-

ling the action and besting a rival through a series of clever pranks. Simply from the point of view of narrative structure there is a comic necessity for the Dominicans to be superior, more intelligent, and deserving of success compared to their unpitiable victim.

For the Dominicans, active works of mercy usually took the form of the ministry, preaching to and educating the laity. At the beginning of the tale-proper the Berwick-poet, whether through shrewd observation or knowledge of the practice, introduces Allane and Robert as a preaching team, socius and limitator,⁷⁴ at least nominally following the apostolic ideals of their order:

So Appinit in A maij morning
That twa of þe Iacobyne freiris,
As thay wer wont and vsit mony 3eiris
To pass amang þair brethir vpaland,
Wer send of þame best practisit and cunnand:
Freir allane [ane] and freir robert the vder.
Thir silly freiris with wyffis weill cowld gluder;
Richt wondir weill plesit þai all wyffis,
And tawld þame tailis of haly sanctis lyffis.

(28-36)

The emphasis is on the whiteness of their habit (24), their purity; and they are licensed for the ministry, "sent" from the Dominicans as "best practisit and cunnand" for preaching, paired off according to

74. Chaucer's Franciscan Friar Huberd is a "lymytour." Abuses wrought by the travelling friars helped most to stain the reputation of friars generally. Hinnebusch, op. cit., I, 270-71, points out that not all brothers were licensed to preach: "The priory entrusted each of its districts to a talented preacher who had charge of all the pastoral activities in his area. He was called a 'limiter,' in Latin terminarius or limitator." Priors, aware of their delicate position in the community, usually assigned to limitors a suitable companion, or socius, in accordance with the Rule of St. Augustine which commands friars travelling outside the priory to go about in pairs, for mutual protection, for companionship, and to avoid scandal. Care and common sense was used in selecting a socius: "A strict friar should accompany a brother who is careless, one wise and prudent, one irresponsible, one mature, a young man who needs his stabilizing influence" (ibid., pp. 364-65).

rule, "tyrit" and "awld" Allane with "3oung" and hot-blooded Robert ((38-41).

Yet it is May, the season of love, and the language used in their portrait is comically ambiguous. In friar-like fashion they seem to prefer to minister to female souls, diverted from "pair brethir" to the wives, with whom they "gluder," that is, flatter, use fair speech. There is a veiled suggestion of bawdry in that "all wyffis" are "won-dir weill plesit." The adjective "silly" applied to the friars--used on several occasions in the sense of holy, innocent, simple--is certainly ironic in combination with "gluder." Seeking shelter a little later, they greet Alesone "with fair hailsing and bekking courteslye" (57). Here again there is the ironic suggestion that they have no business behaving as courtiers. "At pair awin eiss" (70) in Alesone's company, their "haly sanctis lyffis" give way to "mirry tailis" (75); and Allane suggests that their hostess would be welcome at the table ("Cum hiddir, deme, & sett 3ow down me bye, / And fill the cop agane anis to me," 72-73), to which Robert adds she shall be "full weill payit" (74). If they have not lapsed directly, their activities are comically open to question. When Alesone cites the dubious reputation of friars in denying them shelter (85-87), we find her fears potentially justified.

On the other hand, there is nothing overt in their portrait to confirm them in wrongdoing. They teach saint's legends in the manner prescribed by their order, paired off so as to chaperone one another; Robert asks in a friendly way after Symon, the hostler (59);⁷⁵ they observe the rules of abstinence, sticking to bread, cheese, and ale,

75. Allane asks after him in the 1622 print.

apparently satisfied with this simple fare; and when their own abbey's prayer bell, like the voice of conscience, rouses them from their ease they are "agast" (76-77), a gesture which does not seem feigned. Any suggestions of lack of innocence remain decidedly ambiguous. The Berwick-poet provides hints in their portrait of the anti-mendicant literary tradition, setting up the audience for particular expectations about them. But, ironically, these suggestions are undoubtedly fulfilled only in Abbot Johine. This is a form of comic misdirection, preparing "traditional" expectations in an audience only to ironically traduce those expectations (in this case by retaining an air of ambiguity about their behaviour throughout the tale yet never finally tipping the balance toward serious moral turpitude).

This moral ambiguity in regard to their behaviour is maintained partly by the presence of Friar Allane. Not simply a "passive foil" to Friar Robert, present "merely for purposes of contrast with the hero,"⁷⁶ Allane functions both as a prime mover in the tale and as a figure of restraint. In strictly fabliau terms Allane is anomalous, not only unnecessary but in fact in Robert's way should he have designs upon Alesone. If Robert, alone and without reasonable cause,⁷⁷ sought shelter in the Lawrear's inn, we would have every reason to suspect his intentions; in fact, we would have every reason to expect that he would end up enjoying Alesone's favours himself, in place of both Symon and Johine. But Robert is "strong and wicht" (43), though carrying both their loads able to push on to town. It is Allane, requir-

76. Hart, op. cit., PMLA, 365.

77. Compare Hinnebusch, op. cit., I, 365: "When they could, the friars lodged and ate en route in the Order's priories or in other religious houses, not in homes or inns."

ing rest, who brings them to lodge at Symon's public house. Allane's continued presence, and to a certain extent his "passive" behaviour (in the loft he "lay down as best be micht" and bides "still," 115, 173), acts to lend an air of legitimacy to the Dominicans.

Allane controls the action in the first half of the tale, as Robert controls it in the second half after Symon's return. Thus the older man, rather than his hot-blooded young companion, has the most direct dealings with Alesone, in effect neutralizing lust as their driving motive. Allane's character is mainly governed by physical needs and a comic penchant for creature comforts ("fill the cup agane anis to me"). Old, tired, wet, and troubled with kidneystones ("a littil spyce of gravell," 40, perhaps comically accounting for some of his wetness, a condition further hobbling any notion of lustfulness), Allane fears that they have missed curfew in returning late from their preaching sojourn. He logically suggests they seek "harbrye" nearby (46-50). It is unclear how long they spend at table, whether their "mirry tailis" are full-length stories or short anecdotes, or how close it was to darkness and curfew when they entered the inn ("it drew lang toward þe nicht," 44). But, once sure that "the 3ettis wer closit fast...Than the gudwyfe thay prayit for cheritie" (78-80), receiving in answer her fraudulent morally outraged refusal. Allane, not Robert, begs that they be allowed to stay:

"na, fair dame,
For godis saik heir me quhat I sall say.
In gud faith, we will both be deid or day;
The way is evill, and I am tyrit and wett;
Our 3ettis ar closit that we may nocht win in.
To causs ws perreiss, but help, 3e haif grit syn:
Thair foir, of verry neid we mon byd still,
And ws commit al haill in to 3our will."

(90-98)

I do not believe that there is a pun on "will," as there seems to be

later ("in to the loft Thay wantit of thair will," 114). His seemingly irrefutable "verry neid" is an appeal for charity ("For godis saik") on Alesone's part. Most of what he says "in gud faith" is true; yet, despite the real hazards, his assumption that they "will both be deid or day" is ironically exaggerated. He offers her a chance to save their lives and so avoid mortal sin. But he puts a comically unjustified pressure on her by stressing not so much their perilous position as hers, concentrating on her duty to herself and her faith. With subtlety, he has cleverly countered her moral indignation as a Christian woman ("Our deir lady mary keip [me] fra sic cace," 88) by citing higher obligations which, as a professed Christian, she could hardly refuse. His chief argument rests on a comic gap in logic which Alesone fails to perceive.

Before disappearing from the story as an individual--the two Dominicans seem to merge into one, Friar Robert, thereafter⁷⁸--Friar Allane's last action is to match Symon's good-hearted generosity. Symon offers to share with them

"pairt of sic gud as we haif."
Freir Allane said, "ser, I pray god 3ow saif!
for heir is now annwch of godis gud."
(299-301)

If we envision Allane with one eye on the almshouse where Johine's feast is stored and the other wistfully on Robert it is possible to read his speech ironically, for he knows Robert has designs on the hidden feast. On the other hand, Robert does not yet know how to secure the "luvis supper" for their use. We are safer here in assuming the literal intent of his words, that he is willing to partake gladly of Symon's

78. Allane is not mentioned again by name, but only appears in company (394-95, 420). Cf. "Thay sportit thame and makis mirry cheir / With sangis lowd, baith symone and the freir" (all extant texts; my italics).

charitable fellowship; he acknowledges the source of all bounty ("anwch of godis gud"), finding even poor fare from such a source sufficient, and commends Symon to God's protection. But whether we interpret his benediction with or without an ironic wink, the speech sparks in Symon a wish to offer better fare, which in turn inspires Robert with an idea how to unlock the treasures of the almery. Thereafter the comic manipulations of the tale are in Robert's care.

In the first half of the fabliau Allane speaks sixteen lines and Robert only six. After Symon's return this ratio is emphatically reversed, so much so that Allane all but vanishes from the action. Robert's behaviour and motives in his role of clerc écolier are ethically questionable, yet remain comically ambiguous. Robert comes to life, as it were, in the storage loft, where, though grateful for shelter (109), both friars "wantit of thair will" (114). Precisely what this means--whether they wished for better food, better beds, or Alesone's favours--is left unexplained, though the usual punning connotations of "will" would suggest sexual dissatisfaction. In spite of Alesone's feigned indignation and virtue, "Freir robert had ane littill Ielosity / For in his hairt he had ane persaving" (173-74). It was highly unusual to be relegated to the grain loft, even under the circumstances--not only could the friars pay for their lodging (74), they had sworn to be obedient to Alesone (98). Her demeanour has raised in Robert a "Ielosity," or suspicion. Yet the word "Ielosity" is ambiguous, and carries strong sexual connotations as well which would suggest that Robert is envious of Johine and his material pleasures. The difficulty in affirming such a reading, however, is that Robert has not at this point bored a hole in the floorboards and so discovered the lovers "sportand thame and makand melody" (185) in the height of

amorous pride at their "luvis supper" (122). The use of sexually euphemistic language in regard to his motivation is at best comically suggestive.⁷⁹ Robert expresses--again ambiguously--a wish to possess Johine's feast (265-69); that he also desires to enjoy Johine's lover is much less clear, and remains unfulfilled in the tale. This again indicates comic misdirection in character development, supplying broad ambiguous hints which are finally thwarted as the tale develops.

Later, over his unappetizing cold cuts, Symon wishes aloud for company at dinner (258). Alesone refuses, attempting to hurry him off to bed; but Robert, unable to resist, takes him at his word:

Freir robert said, "allace, gud brodir deir,
I wald þe gudman wist þat we wer heir.
Quha wait? perchance sum bettir wald he fair,
For sickerly my hairt will ay be sair
gif 3one scheipheid with symon birneist be,
Sa mekill gud cheir being in the almerie."
And with þat word he gaif ane hoist anone.
(263-69)

Robert has an undeniable personal interest in the contents of the almerie, and there is considerable irony in his "selfless" wish for his friend Symon: "perchance sum bettir wald he fair."⁸⁰ But, despite this incongruity, he expresses a genuine concern for Symon's welfare. It irritates Robert ("my hairt will ay be sair") that Symon has been abused, cozened by a deceitful wife who obviously overmatches him in-

79. Compare the use of "invy" in the context of Alesone's fear of being discovered: "our dame had woundir grit invy / For in hir hairt scho had ane persaving / That he had knawin all" (337-39). "Invy" also carries strong sexual association, yet such a view is highly inappropriate in context. Perhaps the sexual meaning of "Ielosy" is also meant to be ignored. The phrase echoes Robert's (173-74), effectively showing the comic reversal of their roles. Cf. The Taming of the Shrew, which uses "jealousy" to mean simply "suspicion": "For our first merriment hath made thee jealous" (IV.v.76).

80. The phrase consciously echoes Robert's first speech in the loft: "I hecht to walk this nicht. / Quha wait? perchance sum sport I ma espy" (116-17).

tellectually. Robert's speech is both ironic and serious. Marshalling his own (comically treacherous) intellectual resources, Robert wishes to help Symon--and incidentally himself--to a better meal than a cold sheephead (and here the syntax, comically, is fluid enough to allow some equation of Symon with the sheephead, certainly a dish which has been appropriately served). Robert may be guided by greed; but he has already eaten and was apparently satisfied. He may be motivated by vengeance; but again, it is not his feast nor his lover, and, even though he may be loath to see a rival enjoy such pleasures and takes personally the tricks played on Symon, finally he has not been cheated out of any expressed expectations. Rather he seems to be motivated by small mixtures of both gluttony and revenge leavened with a desire to help Symon and a large dose of mischief.

The qualification "perchance" in Robert's speech indicates that he has as yet no idea how he will safely recall the "gud cheir" of the almy for their use without arousing Symon's suspicions. True to the traditions of the Wily Clerk, his is a spontaneous genius, a quick wit applied to chance opportunities as they arise. Immediately, he secures an invitation to come down with a comically calculated cough; and in accepting Symon's offer he responds with an undoubtedly heartfelt but ironically understated "The gudman is verry velcome hame" (288). The chance to overcome his major obstacle--procuring the feast--presents itself when Allane's benediction awakens in Symon if not a sudden embarrassment at the poverty of his board at least a wish for greater charity to bestow: "3it wald I gif ane croun of gold for me / for sum gud meit and drink amangis ws thre" (303-304). Quickly seizing the initiative, Robert offers to oblige:

"quhat drinkis wald 3e craif,
Or quhat meitis desyre 3e for to haif?

For I haif mony sindry practikis seir--
 be3ond the sey in pareiss did I leir--
 That I wald preve glaidly, for 3our saik
 And for 3our demys, that harbry coud us maik.
 I tak on hand, And 3e will consale keip,
 That I sall gar 3ow se or ever I sleip
 Of the best meit that is in this cuntre,
 Of gascone wyne, gif ony in It be."

(305-314)

Here is no calculated scheme but comic ingenuity developing naturally from advantageous circumstances. The inspired spontaneity of his wit enhances the comedy of the situation. By virtue of his Continental education, with its magical associations of "be3ond the sey,"⁸¹ he assures Symon he has practices to supply their wants, an ironically true statement. He knows from having observed Alesone operate on him (225-56) that he is dealing with a "simple" Symon if ever there was one. He requires that his audience tell no one about his "learning" but his "consale keip," both for reasons of laudable modesty,⁸² ironic in this case, and of comic necessity. And before proceeding, Robert clarifies his motives, carefully acknowledging the reasons why he will undertake this unusual venture: "for 3our saik, / And for 3our demys, that harbry coud us maik." Robert responds to Symon's generosity, his need of help and his desire for better fare, but more specifically to Alesone's charity for harbouring them. He has not forgotten their obligation to her for sheltering them against her better judgement, nor Allane's oath binding them "alhail in to [her] will." Alesone is most in danger near the feast's end, for by then Robert has nothing to lose but

81. Earlier Robert had set up his associations with St. Jacobus in Paris by swearing "be sweit sanct Iame" (287).

82. Williams, op. cit., 508, cites William of St.-Amours: true apostles "do not glory in the miracles the Lord performs through them. Only false apostles glory in the special favours God shows them." He continues: "True apostles...hate no one, not even their enemies." This is relevant in regard to Robert's treatment of Johine.

credibility,⁸³ having enjoyed the feast and "playit cop owt" (393).

But he does not expose her; and although the iniquitous do not escape unscathed, charity is ironically answered in kind.

Robert's charity, while ironic, is also all-embracing in nature. He supplies his host an unlooked for feast; he shields his erring hostess from a fate worse than embarrassment; and he even contrives to salvage Abbot Johine from a potentially disastrous situation, imposing a physical penance but helping his rival to escape "undetected." As it turns out, by "protecting" the guilty couple, Robert effects a much wittier, funnier, and more satisfying system of poetic justice, in certain respects psychologically more painful than exposure and punishment.

The second major demonstration of Robert's roguish genius is the expulsion of Johine. Also delightfully sudden, this likewise occurs without Robert's apparent forethought. It is again Symon who supplies Robert the unexpected opportunity to apply his wit by inquiring where the feast came from (422-24). When Robert tells him a tongue-in-cheek version of the truth--it was provided by a fiendish "pege" (426)--Symon wishes to see it. The "fiend" is too horrible to behold in its natural state, and a discussion ensues as to which form their devil should as-

83. In protecting Alesone, Robert is obliged to protect Johine as well; although he does not owe his rival any favours and he stands to gain nothing more by aiding the latter's "unseen" egress. His motivation cannot be merely selfishness. But I do not mean to play down Robert's weighty practical considerations for not revealing everything directly to Symon after the meal: that would spoil the Lawrears' marriage, Johine's career, and the friars' reputations. If he admitted his conjurations were a hoax, he would lose his credibility and throw away his advantageous position (and future leverage against the couple) in a mean-spirited gesture. Further, his knowledge of the feast and the adulterous affair might sully his image, making him look as if he were a party to it, or worse, as if he were a rival jealous for Alesone's favours.

sume. Symon, believing spirits in white guise--indicating purity--to be unarmful (461), suggests that it appear in the white habit of his Dominican guests. But Robert takes comic umbrage, finding the suggestion insulting, and ironically settles on calling it forth "translated" down to the normal and viewable form of fiends on earth, Franciscans:⁸⁴

Freir robert said that "swa it cowlde nocht be"--
 For sic caussis as he may weill foirse--
 "That he compeir in to our habeit quhyt,
 Vntill [our] ordor it wer a grit dispyte
 That ony sic vnworthy wicht as he
 in till our habeit Men sowld behald or se.
 Bot sen it pleissis 3ow þat ar heir,
 3e sall him se in liknes of a freir:
 In habeit [gray] it was his kynd to weir,
 [In sic wyss yat he sall no man deir.]
 (462-71)

Robert may well foresee that such a shape as his own would not do; and in providing a perfectly natural explanation, he manages to compound the joke on the Franciscans. Throughout the debate Robert has been abusing his "fiend," calling it a "pege," insisting on its maddening ugliness and complete dissimilarity to Dominicans. Now he climaxes his insults by confiding that the "habeit gray" is the natural ("kynd") dress of earthly fiends. Ironically insulting his victim and the Franciscan order the whole way, he has elaborately prepared for Johine's ejection.

Robert, as comic puppet-master, is the undoubted wit-figure. The Lawrears and Abbot Johine are the comic butt-figures, the victims of his clever manipulations and their own folly. But the degrees to which each is tricked, and Robert's reasons for doing so, are widely at variance. That is, Robert is protective of all parties, but holds a benign wit-butt relationship with Symon, and, to a lesser extent,

84. Cf. Dunbar's dream-devil in his poem "How Dunbar wes desyrd to be ane Freir," disguised as a Franciscan (Dunbar, p. 165).

with Alesone. The wit-butt relationship he maintains with Johine, while equally comic (i.e. he never pushes his tricks to the point of serious harm), is more malicious in nature, painfully corrective.

Robert uses Symon's curiosity as a means of being rid of their hidden guest, first debating at length with the naive and superstitious Symon. Symon "mervills mikill" how all the "denteis" were supplied "sa suddanlye" (422-24), and when Robert tells him he has a devilish servant Symon accepts it on the wrong kind of faith that Robert derives his power from the black arts. Earlier, Alesone brought forth the feast as Robert commanded, assessing the situation with ironic accuracy: "Quhat sall I say? he is ane haly freir. / He said full swth of all pat he did say" (371-72; my italics). But Symon conceives him not as "ane haly freir" but instead as "ane man of grit science," able to work miracles "throw subteltie" and "knewlege in philosophie" (382-85). The distance between "haly freir" and scientist/philosopher is considerable, pointing up not only his gullibility but, ironically, a serious deficiency in his religious understanding. Symon is dangerously simple, harmful not so much to others but to himself. He is perfectly willing to believe that Robert is in league with the Devil and served by fiends. Far from horrified, comically he wishes to see the fiend for himself; and though Robert gives the appearance of trying to beg off during their debate, Symon is insistent, content to abide by Robert's conditions but unwilling to take no for an answer.

Of course, Robert's method of providing the feast and expelling Johine--lying to his host and grotesquely parodying religious offices--is as unsavoury in theological terms as it is funny. But his motives are not purely selfish (that is, he contrives to protect all concerned); and for a clerkly fabliau-hero it is a masterstroke. After all, Symon

is the only one present who is deceived, and Robert's whole absurd show is for his benefit, for everyone but Symon knows the true origins of the feast and "fiend." Robert can only deceive Symon if Symon is willing to be gulled. Robert is able to use Symon's known superstitious credulousness to everyone's advantage, and Symon is the more blameworthy for his irreligious ignorance than Robert for deceiving him with mock-conjurations.

Robert's gaming has a more punitive meaning for Alesone, though she is not abused openly. Robert does not reveal Alesone's secrets. But the continuing possibility of exposure throughout the night causes her to suffer--comically, since she has brought it on herself--the considerable psychological discomforts of anguish and anxiety. Due to her fear and shame she remains at Robert's mercy, enthralled the entire night. As she quickly discovers, through Robert's inventive if ridiculous initial exercise in glowering, gaping, roaming, reading, sitting, clapping, and generally behaving "as he wer woid" (321-47), that he had "sene hir govirnance" (361). Forced to play along with him for the sake of appearances, her abiding concern, she spends the rest of the night on pins and needles, pretending to be cheerful yet with a "hert full wo and hevy" (417). With supreme irony, the ever-generous Symon invites her to join them at her own dinner, incidentally rubbing salt in her wounds by first admonishing her to thank their "timely" guest (386) for his "gud govirnance" (391):

"Cum heir, fair deme, and sett 3ow down me by,
And tak pairte of sic gud as we haif heir;
And hairtly I 3ow pray to thank this freir
Off his bening grit besines and cure."

(399-402)

Though Symon's description of Robert's activity as essentially benign is correct, for Alesone the words "besines" (suggesting "busybody")

and "cure" must take on ironic overtones. Predictably enough, "quhen thay wer maist at eiss / Vnto our deme it wes bot littill pleiss" (406-407). Symon and the friars have a pleasant time, but she is totally unable to enjoy any part of the meal,⁸⁵ anticipating momentary exposure:

Scho wes so red, her hairt was ay on flocht
That throw the freir scho sowld discoverit be.
To him scho lukit oft tymes effeiritlie,
And ay disparit in hart was scho.

(409-412)

Alesone's "redness," formerly associated with her amorousness, is ironically transmuted to guilt as her "desperate" heart flutters in fear.⁸⁶

Johine's fall, because he is a high-ranking churchman responsibly sworn to uphold strict principles, is even greater than Alesone's, and it is therefore comically appropriate that he suffer greater harm. This is also in accordance with fabliaux tradition: as we have seen, if anyone is to suffer, it is the prêtre amant, the usual losers in fabliau love and frequent butt of fabliau jokes. Johine all this while has been trapped like an entombed man in the cramped and stifling confines of the meal trough listening nightlong to the merry-makers. He is as aware as Alesone that he could be exposed by Robert at any moment. We can assume, since he is demonstrably more afraid of capture and has more to lose than Alesone (193-204), that he has been in a paralyzing funk the whole night; and it must vex him that these

85. There is a suggestion in the unique lines of the 1622 Print that Alesone is also annoyed by the fact that they are enjoying her food: "And in her heart shee did despaire lykewyse / That they did eate her Dainties in that guyse."

86. She specifically reveals her fright in an aside: "[Gif] symon wit It wilbe deir doing" (344). On Alesone's colour symbolism, see below, pp. 231-32.

intruders are enjoying a costly meal at his expense. His comic indiscretions have landed him in a situation simultaneously embarrassing and terrifying. He cannot slip out unnoticed while the husband is at table; and if he waits until the party-makers fall into a wine-induced slumber it could be dawn, at which time his absence would be noticed at the abbey, and it becomes possible that the townsfolk of Berwick might sight him leaving the inn.

Paradoxically, it is Robert, his chief tormentor, who extricates him. Johine is completely powerless; and though Robert takes the opportunity to castigate him with witty insults, pranks at his expense, and even physical abuse, Robert does not take one final advantage of his position--exposing him to ruin--but instead helps Johine to a relieved banishment. As earlier Robert had conjured the feast with a ceremony of mock "black magic," he divorces the Lawrear's devil from the house by means of a parodic "exorcism," an abbreviated version of the same ceremony. Robert is at pains to ensure that Johine understands his motivation. After preparing Symon, Robert turns to the trough and "conjuges" the hidden "Hurlybass" (499) with a set of specific instructions comically apt both for Symon's devil and the miscreant friar. He commands Abbot Johine to cover his face and hands so as not to be recognized, then puts him in mind of his salvation:

"Thow may thank god that thow gettis sic a grace!
 Thairfoir thow turss the to thyne awin resett;
 Se this be done, and mak no moir debait.
 In thy depairting se thow mak no deray
 Vnto no wicht, bot frely pass thy way,
 And in this place se pat thow cum no moir."

(509-514)

Ironically employing the inferior "thee" and "thou" form of address, Robert grants Johine "a grace" in the name of the Lord, allowing him to return to his proper place ("thyne awin resett"), enjoining him not

to return to the scene of his temptation and disgrace. Robert humiliates him but does not destroy him. Without minimizing his pain, Johine is treated relatively leniently, receiving the unmerited gift of love; or so, at least, Robert claims.

Johine's slapstick suffering, though considerable, could be considerably worse. A public scandal of this sort could be extremely damaging to a man of Johine's rank and position in the community, and a revelation of his adulterous affairs with Alesone would undoubtedly bring Symon's wrath upon him: if Symon is "sa ferce" with his "libberla" (529-32) against a creature which has done him no harm but in fact fed him, we can imagine what he would be like in a passionate rage. Robert humiliates Johine privately, causing Symon, the offended party, to administer a sound whacking with force enough to propel him into the mud and accumulated household slops below the stair; thus his spiritual fall and disgrace is comically matched with a physical one, and as a result his outward appearance ("nathing fair," 537, ironically understated) corresponds to his inner defilement. But even mistreated in this way Johine realizes that events could have turned out much worse than they have, and the narrator reports "Off his eschaiping in hairt he wes full fane" (543). Released from his torturous captivity, he suffers nothing worse than a lost feast (in and out of bed), insults, a blow to the neck, and, accidentally, a cold and unsavoury drenching. His hubristical pride is utterly cast down; but he has escaped public exposure, and murder at the hands of a jealous husband. Compared to disgrace and serious injury, possibly death, he has not suffered terribly. Nor has the joke against him been spoiled in any way. Suffering under Robert's ironic wit, he has merely been made ridiculous. For his leniency we must credit Robert's restraint;

if Robert were at all like the spiteful and vengeful clerk in Le Povre Clerc (discussed below) he would gain considerable satisfaction by ruining Johine. Once the literally and figuratively "graceles gaist" (560, punning on "ghost," or spirit) is gone Robert can say with assurance "the werst is all away" (555). We are able to laugh at the error-ridden abbot because he has no redemptive features and he receives a deserved chastizement suited to his offences, and because Robert has not made himself dispicable or soured the proceedings with cruelly excessive punishment or with attempts to judge and condemn Johine's misdeeds, thereby striking an attitude of moral superiority. We are left feeling that Robert's methods, at once ironically "clerkly" and yet somehow softened by the habit he wears, are both comically just and satisfying.

Robert is by no means, as is common in fabliaux, simply a clever rascal who "delights in the art of gulling for its own sake."⁸⁷ In Robert we have a Wily Clerk with a moral bent, who for selfish, mischievous, but also generously humane ends uses his intelligence to extricate two lovers from the folly of their own making. At the same time, he protects Symon from further cuckoldry and shrewish abuse, and the lovers from greater spiritual self-abuse, by silently punishing them. No doubt he enjoys besting his Franciscan rival (although we are presented no direct evidence of his pleasure, indicated in laughter or similar gauges). But he does not act to destroy the erring lovers--which he could easily manage--or, in spite of his obvious capacity for deceiving Symon, to enjoy Alesone's delights himself. He cleverly performs good deeds for the deserving, and metes out an effective but

87. Hart, op. cit. PMLA, 363.

relatively merciful justice to the sinners, never by word or deed earning our reproach or contempt but instead our laughter and applause. Despite the comic paradoxes and questionable ethics of his acts, he is guided much more by caritas than by cupiditas. A morally responsible clerc écolier is highly unconventional in fabliaux.

Aside from the nameless, voiceless maid, only Johine seems to be a strictly one-dimensional personality. When introduced to the wayward abbot we instantly and unquestionably enter a different conventional world from that of the Dominicans. Representing of course the bumbling prêtre amant, stock figure of ridicule in the fabliaux tradition, Johine is fleshed out with characteristics from the satiric anti-mendicant literary tradition. Taken altogether, Johine is not "on stage," as it were, for very long. Yet with remarkable skill and economy the Berwick-poet shows us all we need to know of his unworthy character. Alesone

wald haif none vder company
 Becauss freir Iohine that nicht with hir sowld ly,
 Quha dwelland wes in to pat samyne toun,
 And ane [gray] freir he wes of grit renown.
 He govirnit alhaill the abbacy;
 Silwer and gold he had abundantly.
 He had a prevy posterne of his awin
 quhair he micht Ische, quhen pat his list, vnknawin.
 (123-30)

Within five lines, before we have ever met Johine, he seems to be Hypocrisy incarnate: he has shattered the three mendicant vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Not only has he silver and gold, he has them in abundance. No one can doubt the nature of his assignation with Alesone, and we see that he has taken pains to plan his unchastity, making sure that he can come and go unnoticed. As to his disobedience, this is clear and made more pointed by his position in

society: Johine is not simply another friar, but Father Superior of the Franciscan abbey in Berwick, its governor, its leader, and, in theory, its most exemplary member. If reprobate Johine is the best, what must the worst be like? Add to this the element of pride in worldly fame, his "grit renown," indicative of his concern with reputation and concern for recognition⁸⁸--meddling in secular affairs which surely should be none of his business--and we have, however brief, a deft comic portrait of uncompromising apostasy.

By the time Johine knocks his secret knock at Alesone's gate we know what sort of behaviour to expect. According to William of St.-Amours' De periculis, "true apostles do not creep into houses and lead weak women astray."⁸⁹ Questions of Alesone's "weakness" aside, these are exactly Johine's acts and intentions, seducing women in the dead of night when their husbands are away. He has brought the makings of a substantial and expensive dinner to match Alesone's rich preparations. Prominent in his feast are his gifts of red "gascone wyne" (158) and high-quality white "breid of mane" (160), from the French pain de maine or "Lord's bread" (mentioned as a unit-pair throughout the rest of the tale: 219, 354-55, 374). There is an unmistakable element of parody of his priestly function at the Eucharist in their unrighteous feast of love, highly ironic, if not also the sly suggestion that before sneaking to his assignation Johine raided the abbey's larder for (presumably unconsecrated) bread and wine. Abstinence from meat was of course the rule of all the mendicant orders, except on special oc-

88. Williams, op. cit., again citing William of St.-Amours' forty-point enumeration of faults in friar conduct, De periculis: "true apostles do not seek the favors of the world, nor to please men."

89. Ibid., 512.

casions. We see Johine as a rich lover, a "derne" (secret) lover, and a gourmet (not to say a gourmand), but not as a friar, let alone the superior of a religious house.

Even as a lover his image fails to improve, true to comic tradition. In Symon's absence, Johine attempts to take the innkeeper's place at board and in bed: "Sen it is so þat semon is fra hame / I wilbe hamely now with 3ow gud dame," he puns merrily (163-64). They are lusty enough at foreplay, "sportand" in word and deed ("He thris-tit hir hand agane richt prevely, / Than in hett luve thay talkit vderis till," 168-69); and as Alesone is "prowd as ony papingo" (148), so too is Johine proud, "so prelat lyk sat he in to þe chyre" (183), a suggestion of overweening presumption.

But his "courage" is merely that of desire and love's ardour: when Symon unexpectedly returns and interrupts them, both are thrown into a panic from which Johine does not recover. The poet of course is making the comic contrast between the impotent, weak, and "womanish" male and his female companion, who is contrarily strong, intelligent, and resourceful. Ironically, they exchange traditional roles. Alesone soon regains her composure and takes command of the situation with a "visage stowt" (196); Johine remains in a stuporous "fellone fray," only able to whine helplessly "Quhat sall I do, allace?" (204, 212).⁹⁰ At length she manages to "gart him creip in hy" (209) into a meal trough, where he remains cowering in terror for the remainder of the

90. The Maitland Folio text, contributing four unique lines, supplies Johine some extra dialogue in which he fears for his testicle at the hands of the outraged Symon:

"Into this case, lord, how sall I me beir?
For I am schent and symond fynd me heir!
I dreid me sair and he cum in this Innis
And find me heir yat I loss both my quhyannis!"
(209-212)

tale until he is driven from hiding into the night.

Johine's type is easily identified in both the anti-mendicant and fabliau literary traditions, a ridiculous and ludicrous figure embodying the worst of both satiric worlds, as scarcely any ignoble trait of either is omitted. As a priest he is a travesty. He is hypocritical, lecherous, proud, and worldly, heedless of his own vocation and actively imperilling his own and other souls. He is a witless "fair weather" lover, impotent in a crisis and a decided coward when caught in a compromising situation, a predestinate love failure. He is absurd, inept, and morally reprehensible; and he is therefore deserving of any of the comic evils which befall him and the ill-treatment he brings on himself, for he has no positive qualities whatsoever to cause the reader to pity him or sully our enjoyment of the tricks played on him. During the course of the night Johine degenerates utterly, the helpless butt of his own folly and his rivals' jests, descending from an exalted and respectable position as head of a religious house through various degrading stages down finally to the lowly rank of fiend-servant from Hell, pained, excommunicated, and defiled physically and spiritually. The satire, charting his degradation, is complete; and, in terms of the character, completely warranted.

The closed fortification of the town (1-17) serves to contrast with the comic scalability of the Lawrear's walls (540-41) and the openness of Alesone's house and person. Also a stock character type, Alesone is the well-worn Lecherous Wife of the fabliau tradition, unfaithful and shrewish. She has numerous literary ancestors, but she is nonetheless a full-blooded and complex individual. More than merely bored with her husband and chasing after sexual satisfaction, Alesone has

definite social pretensions, a more than acutely developed sense of lechery, and most of all an estimable store of courage and ready wit. She is highly intelligent; and despite the fact that her activities are selfish and immoral--essential contributions to the comedy--we cannot help admiring her in action.

When initially introduced, the innkeeper's "fair blyth wyf" (54) is an unknown factor, described by the narrator only by reputation: "scho wes sumthing dynk and dengerous" (55). Her "dynk and dengerous" nature is contrasted with the Dominicans' "silly"-ness, as she answers their fair greeting and courteous bows "in hye," or proudly (56-58). She is at pains to seem proper and respectable, remaining aloof and disdainful of their company at table. Her haughty behaviour, in keeping with her pride, gives her the false appearance of sobriety and chastity.

Her true deceptive nature comes to the fore, however, when the forgetful friars find themselves obliged to request lodging at her inn (80). In response to their plea for compassionate consideration they receive Alesone's scornful reply:

Bot scho to pame gaif answer with grit hicht:
 "The gudman is fra hame, as I 3ow tald,
 And, god It wait, gif I durst be sa bald
 To herbry freiris in this houss with me
 Quhat wald symon say, ha! benedicite!
 Bot in his absence I abusit his place?
 Our deir lady mary keip [me] fra sic cace,
 And keip me owt of perrell and of schame!"
 (82-89)

In this incongruous and semi-blasphemous denial, Alesone, under pretence of defending her virtue, plays on the conventional reputation of friars as lecherous vagabonds. She puts on a show of innocence, honour, and purity, citing her husband's suspicious nature--an obvious fabrication as it turns out later (cf. 278-79), but also a conventional ex-

pectation--and concern for her reputation to deny the two friars their request in order to have them out of the way when she receives her genuinely lecherous friar-lover, Johine. Her hypocritical pretence is made doubly ironic by her invocation to the Blessed Virgin for protection (likewise a convention), wholly inappropriate considering her real motives. Ironically, she rejects their plea for "cheritie" in the name of God. Allane manages grudgingly to circumvent her mock-"righteous indignation" and break her resolve. She is trapped into accepting them almost as much by her pretended virtue as by Christian obligation; she has to keep up appearances, and put them off without raising their suspicions. But, still harping on protecting her reputation, she removes them from the main room and exiles them to the storage loft; again, she invokes God's name ("be him þat ws coft," 101) to cement her denial of normal lodging.

When the friars are put aside, so is her need to pretend for the benefit of her public image. The reader has been taken in by her dissembling along with the Dominicans, but the illusion of her righteousness is dispelled with comic vigour. We discover that she has been ungracious and anxious to be rid of the intruders because she has taken advantage of Symon's absence to set up an illicit "luvis supper," as she puns, with Abbot Johine. She has taken one of the highest ranking religious personages in town as her lover, and this perfectly reflects her prideful nature ("prowd as ony papingo," 148). Her pride is amply demonstrated not only in her choice of lovers and her demeanour toward the Dominicans but in her riches: she has a sumptuous dwelling, a maid of all work (136), expensive clothes (143-46), at least twenty rings (147), and an abundance of furnishings including an almery (217), a meal trough (206), a "chrye" (183) as opposed to mere

benches,⁹¹ and table linen "of costly grene" (149). Her worldly wealth is considerable. Alesone is used to nothing but the finest material possessions, and harbours obvious social pretensions.

Alesone is lecherous as well as proud. Life for Alesone, indeed most of the fabliau's action, centres around the "cuerit burde." All of the characters enter the inn literally hungry; and "appetite," sexual (in Alesone and Johine's case) or otherwise, is prominently featured throughout. In preparing the "luvis supper," Alesone

be fyre cowlde beite,
And thristit on fatt Caponis to be speite,
And fatt cuning to a fyre did scho lay.
(133-35; my italics)

In light of the following passage, the comic suggestion of sexual imagery is surely deliberate. After preparing this element of the supper, she returns to her bedroom to change her clothes, first fanning the fires of her own lust:

Scho pullit hir cunt and gaif it buffettis tway
vpoun be cheikis, syne till it cowlde scho say:
"3e sowlde be blyth and glaid at my requeist;
Thir myllis of 3ouris ar callit to ane feist."
(139-42; my italics)

She speaks to her genitalia as if it was a separate face,⁹² promising her lower "lips" an acceptable dish. The double slap on the pudenda makes best sense (apart from psychologically) in terms of "beating the fire" of the "luvis supper," the initial preparation--at least the activities are parallel--for the "feist" she plans to enjoy not at the

91. See W. Mackay Mackenzie, ed. The Poems of William Dunbar, (London: 1932), 233, notes to line 177.

92. The Maitland Folio text, again in a unique four-line contribution, continues:

Scho said till It, and softlie at [it] scho leucht;
"He did nocht Ill yat fand 3ow half aneuche;
And or I sleip I think 3e shalbe pleisit
3our appetyt and myn sall both be easit."

(M143-46)

table but in bed. This single passage marks Alesone Lawrear as one of the most unique, and unforgettable, comic heroines in all fabliaux literature, establishing her as a figure of female luxury par excellence.

The two elements of her pride in riches and lechery combine in her costume: she wears two rings per finger, and her silk and silver-threaded clothing, but for her "quhyt curch," is bright red, "as the reid gold did schyne" (146), a colour highly appropriate for her after such "fanning the fire" imagery. Her "kirtill" is mentioned twice (143, 145); and this, hard on the heels of her "private" conversation, has the effect of focussing and refocussing our attention on her loins. Alesone is not merely proud as a "papingo," her colours--the white kerchief, the silver thread, the gold rings (a typical lover's gift), the rich green tablecloth, the dominant shining red--are the bright, exotic colours usually associated with parrots. The animal imagery, and her sexual appetite, comically point up her bestial inclinations, her cupiditas. When Abbot Johine makes his anticipated arrival (and as "his knock scho kend," 154, we may assume this is not a first visit), we find his colours appropriate to his love for Alesone: prominent among his delicacies are his gallon of red wine and basket of white bread; further, he has an abundance of silver and gold. The lovers' colours match, comically suited. For pride, lechery, hypocrisy, and Mammon-worship it is hard to conceive of two adulterous lovers better fitted to one another.

We are allowed to participate in Alesone's thoughts (e.g. 341-44), but her character is defined primarily in action (as Johine's is in inaction). Though guilty of the deadliest sins, Alesone is as brave and resourceful as fabliau-wives conventionally are in a crisis. When the lovers, about to take a first bite, are interrupted by Symon, Ale-

sone proves to be a tower of unshakable fortitude--even managing vows of future shreweries aimed at Symon (199-200)--while her ridiculous companion crumbles visibly.

Obviously she has a good notion as to how slow-witted and gullible Symon really is, for she is able to outmanoeuvre him with practiced dexterity. Clearing away the incriminating evidence and hiding her panicked friend, she retires to bed. Symon, locked outside for an uncommonly long time,

for knocking tyrit wes and cryid
 Abowt; he went vnto þe vthir syd
 [Till ane windo wes at hir beddis heid
 And cryit, "alesone, awalk, for goddis deid!"]
 And [ay] on alesone fast cold he cry;
 And at the last scho anserit crabitly
 "Ach! quha be this that knawis sa weill my name?
 Go henss," scho sayis, "for symon is fra hame,
 And I will herbry na gaistis heir, perfey.
 Thairfoir, I pray 3ow to wend on 3our way,
 For at this tyme 3e may nocht lugit be."
 "Than," symone said, "fair dame, ken 3e nocht me?
 I am 3our symone and husband of this place!"
 "Ar 3e my spous symone?" scho sayis, "allace!
 Be misknowledge I had almaist misgane!
 Quha wenit that 3e sa lait wald haif cum hame?"
 (227-40)

Hers is a brilliant ironic stroke, masterfully executed. By pretending to be asleep, Alesone is able to assuage Symon's growing consternation; and by pretending not to know who he is she turns him from an offensive posture to a defensive one before she ever confronts him face to face. Her comic reversal of positions is a time-honoured trick among termagants.⁹³ She answers Symon "crabitly," irritated as having just awakened and as though she were put out rather than the

93. Compare, for example, the confessions of Alyce of Bath, "For half so boldely kan ther no man / Swere an lyen, as a womman kan," etc. (in Chaucer, D227-280); and the Wedo in Dunbar's Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo (Dunbar, 42-59, lines 259-69). The image of Alesone as a bird accords with the wives of Dunbar's Tretis. See below, pp. 402-403.

reverse; and, feigning ignorance about the identity of the late-caller, puts on a show of virtue and modesty similar to the one she played earlier for the Dominicans' benefit. Symon is immediately put off his guard and accepts her explanation, desperate to convince his wife of his own identity. Indeed, it is ironically true that "be misknowledge" Alesone had "almaist misgane," but not in the sense intended for Symon: in not thinking that he would have come home so late she made a miscalculation that very nearly betrayed to him her extra-marital indulgences. Having "awakened" fully, and having sorted out the identity of the husbandman, she "welcomit him on maist hairtly wyiss" (244) with comic hypocrisy. Symon is completely taken in by her portrayal of the loving and virtuous spouse, abandoning any suspicions he may have held. Audience expectations are comically turned upsidedown.

Symon, for his gullibility, seems to deserve everything she dishes out. He too is a standard figure in such farcical intrigues, the traditional Gullible Husband. His main folly is credulousness rather than jealousy; his guilelessness--albeit indicative of a pure heart--is so pronounced as to be almost unbelievable even within the fabliau tradition. This gullibility is irrevocably established later as his dominant character trait when he gives credence to Robert's "magical" feast- and fiend-conjuring abilities. His "wondir," "grit marvell," and superstitious oath "be þe mone" (380) mark him as a credulous simpleton not unlike John the Carpenter in Chaucer's Miller's Tale.⁹⁴ He is slow-witted and easily deceived by those he trusts. But, hardly the conventionally jealous mate Alesone affirms, he is unsuspecting

94. Cf. Chaucer, A3448-86.

and warmly generous to others. His gullibility is not completely a product of smug stupidity. If he were of a suspicious nature he would be much harder to trick; he would also be considerably more contemptible. His positive traits make him a more sympathetic character than we should normally expect in the genre.

Symon, despite his simplicity, is an honest and likeable soul. And he is no weakling: however flawed intellectually, at least he is strong-willed enough not to be henpecked or intimidated. Alesone can gull him, but she cannot push him around (252-55; 280-84). Moreover, he is open-hearted with his friends: far from jealous as Alesone warned, when he learns the friars are in his house his immediate response is

"sa god haif pairt of me,
The freiris twa are hairtly welcome hidder!
Ga call þame doun þat we ma drink togidder."
(278-80)

His unhesitating reaction is not to be suspicious but charitable ("sa god haif pairt of me") and glad of their company. He is so happy, in fact, that he does not stop to think that the whole comic scene he played with Alesone, "I will herbry no gaistis heir perfey," was a fraud.

As Alesone and her faint-hearted lover are allied to each other by interests, negative character traits, and even colours,⁹⁵ so Symon is linked with the heroes of the piece, Robert and Allane. Like Friar Allane (38, 93), Symon enters "verry tyrit, wett, and cauld" (251).

95. They are possibly further linked by Alesone's mariolatry ("Our dear lady mary keip me fra sic cace"). As discussed above (pp. 206-207), although the Blessed Virgin was by no means the exclusive province of the Franciscans, their championship of the doctrine establishing the Immaculate Conception of Mary herself at least makes it possible that Alesone allies herself to the Franciscans.

Like the friars, the hungry Symon calls for "breid & cheiss" and "þe stowp" of ale (249-50): all three, provided the fare of abstinence, are excluded from the rich delights of the "luvis supper." Like the friars, working all day "amang þair brethir vpaland" and returning exhausted at night, Symon has been "In þe cuntre for to seik corn & hay / And vþir thingis quhairof we haif neid" (62-63), coming home in a similar state--and, ironically, the very "thingis" Symon most needs are already providentially stored in his "corn and hay" loft. Like the friars, Symon is unexpected and unwelcome to Alesone, and all three have to expend much energy in begging Alesone to take them in. The consistent parallel of their activities, and the resonant comic repetition, is striking. The Dominicans and Symon are grouped together, as are Alesone and Johine: the friars are acquainted only with Symon, as the lovers are known only to each other, and, a narrative necessity, the two groups do not formally meet although they are opposed. Symon's act of recalling the friars from exile has the effect of marshalling the forces of good wit against Alesone and her naughty friend. As the feast falls out of the hands of the illicit lovers there is movement away from their luxurious cupidity to the brotherly fellowship of Symon and the friars. The meal, diverted from the use and enjoyment of the wicked to the tale's deserving, ironically becomes in one sense a truer "luvis supper," a bountiful gift, and providence of the Lord unlooked for by the feast's participants.

Yet Symon's ignorance is not allowed to go unpunished; comically, he proves to be his own worst enemy. Johine is given a final, and presumably lasting, reminder of his transgression; and Robert recruits the unwitting Symon to deliver that reminder, ironic justice since it is also the blow of an offended husband against a would-be seducer.

By the time Robert consents to make his servant appear, the initially undaunted Symon is beginning to feel "sumthing effrayit, thocht stalwart was his hart" (483) when he receives his instructions when and where to "stryk hardely" (489). This combination of fright and promised bravery may account for the extra flow of adrenalin which causes his "felloun flap" to be "sa ferce he fell owttour þe sek / And brak his heid vpoun ane mustard stane" (531-32). Comic drunkenness perhaps has something to do with it. Whatever its exact source, his excessive blow results in his own physical punishment. We are inclined to laugh at him rather than be sympathetic because his pain, like his religious ignorance and misguided faith, is self-inflicted. Indeed, because Symon as a character is both generous and foolish we are glad that the lovers have not succeeded in tricking him but also satisfied that such monumental folly is not allowed to go unpenalized: his comic self-punishment strikes a perfect balance.

Characterization, at once conventional and in part comically unconventional, bears the main force in the development of the comic plot. The characters' motives, desires, speeches, reactions to changing circumstances, and behaviour toward one another provide the primary substance of the comic action. Closely allied to characterization, sustaining the ironic action and humorous tone, are supportive structural and rhetorical components. As the characters are fully-developed, well-motivated, and believable in thought and behaviour, so is the story as a whole tightly crafted and realistic without sacrificing comic verisimilitude.

One of the first, and for the genre most unusual, structural features we notice about The Freiris of Berwik is the extensive twenty-

seven line introduction vividly establishing the setting of the tale:

As It befell and happinnit in to deid
 Vpoun a rever, The quhilk is callit tweid,
 [At tweidis mowth thair standis a nobill toun
 Quhair mony lordis hes bene of grit renovne,
 Quhair mony a lady bene fair of face,
 And mony ane fresche lusty galland wass.
 In to þis toun, the quhilk is callit berwik,
 Vpoun the sey thair standis nane it lyk,
 For it is wallit weill abowt with stane
 And dowbill stankis castin mony ane;
 And syne the castell Is so strand and wicht--
 With strait towris and turattis he on hicht,
 The [kirnallis] wrocht craftely withall,
 The port cules most subtelly to fall
 Quhen þat thame list to draw þame vpoun hicht--
 That it might be of na maner of micht
 To win þat houss be craft or subteltie.
 Quhairfoir, It is maist gud allutirly,
 In to my tyme, most gudly, Most plesand to be sene:
 The toвне, þe wall, the castell, and þe land,
 The he wallis vpoun þe vpper hand;
 The grit croce kirk, and eik þe masone dew;
 The Iacobene freiris of þe quhyt hew,
 The Carmeleitis, and þe [minouris] eik:
 The four ordouris wer not for to seik,
 Thay wer all in þis toun dwelling.

(1-27)

Often ignored, hardly a celebration of Berwick "in a curious manner characteristic of early Scottish delight in description for its own sake,"⁹⁶ this opening encomium serves several functions. Indeed, many renowned lords, ladies, and gallants had inhabited Berwick, lines calling attention to the theme of love developed later in the tale. But more significantly in terms of the story is the impression of reality created, establishing from the outset the tale's believability:⁹⁷ we have a real town, Berwick, located "at tweidis mowth...vpoun the

96. Hart, op. cit. *PMLA*, 362.

97. This perhaps explains a remark of F.J. Snell, op. cit., 92, that the poet, "quite familiar with the *locus in quo*...hashed up a story out of what was in all likelihood a town scandal, although it has received some embellishment from the poet, who had literary precedents to guide him." On Berwick's strategic importance, see Ranald Nicholson, *Scotland: The Later Middle Ages*, (Edinburgh: 1974), 97-97, 160, *et passim*.

sey," strongly defended by moats, castle, and crenallated walls, with the Maison Dieu and Great Cross Church as specific reference points in town,⁹⁸ in which the four mendicant orders reside, the "Iacobenes" first and then the others. The town is seen in terms of its defences and religious houses. The movement is from the cosmic to the particular, growing ever more specific as our attention is directed from the geographical-historical location of the township to the "outside view" of the defensive perimeter, from the outer battlements to the town's religious landmarks (refuges even further isolated from temporal contact), and more narrowly to the four begging orders with the town. When the tale proper begins we have been emphatically "placed" in its setting and thoroughly prepared for the still more specific focus on two of the Dominican brothers going out one May morning on their accustomed ministerial rounds. We have been further prepared, by the quick shift from Berwick's stout fortifications to its abundant religious houses and the hint of conflict, of competitive rivalry in the crowding together of religious orders, for the comic encounter later between Dominicans Allane and Robert and the Franciscan superior Johine.

Of primary importance in the tale's introduction, however, is the establishment of the religious orders within the town and the impregnability of Berwick's defences ("it micht be of na maner of micht / To win þat houss be craft or subteltie"), providing the necessity of circumstance and genuine motive for the Dominicans to seek shelter in Sy-

98. The "Maison Dieu" in Berwick was one of its oldest and longest surviving hospitals; see Cowan and Easson, *op. cit.*, 171. The "Great Cross Church" has not been certainly identified, but it may have been St. Mary's Kirk near the Scotsgate: see F.N. Norman, Official Guide to the Fortifications of Berwick-Upon-Tweed, (Berwick: 1907), 20, who reproduces a detail of a map made in Elizabeth I's reign now in the British Museum showing a large cross on the roof of St. Mary's Kirk.

mon's public house once curfew has rung. If the city's gates are closed, as Allane fears, we know instantly that they are trapped outside town. Without this basic premise the narrative collapses, and this has been so skilfully contrived that we do not question it when they ask Alesone for "herbry": we assume that they have no choice. Berwick's impene-
trability is corroborated by the necessity of Johine having to have "a privy postern of his awin" in order to slip out secretly to his lady-love. The non-intriguing Dominicans, of course, rely on the main gates for access to town.

The entire poem is as carefully designed as its introduction. Interwoven with characterization, the comic action is also predicated on three closely interrelated structural and thematic components in the tale: chance, charity, and answered prayers or wishes. Chance, naturally occurring accidental circumstance, plays a crucial role in plot development. If the Dominicans did not return to town late enough and Allane worn out enough to consider the necessity of seeking shelter outwith its walls, we have no story at all. The circumstances--the time drawing "neir towart þe nict" and curfew, Allane's age, exhaustion, and physical pain, and the friars' acquaintance with Symon Lawrear (59)--all conspire to divert them into the Lawrear's inn and the subsequent diningroom farce.⁹⁹ These circumstances must be both reason-

99. It can be argued that the Dominicans, who "with wyffis weill cowlde gluder," have planned to spend the night outside the town in Symon's public house--although this is nowhere suggested; that Allane's problems are feigned, merely excuses to suggest they lasciviously spend the night drinking and flirting with Alesone. Thus not chance but design brings them to the inn. But this interpretation has its problems, leaving many loose details unresolved. It presupposes many factors: that the narrator was misleading us in describing Allane's condition; that old, tired Allane, whose idea it is to go to the inn, is the lecher rather than young, "hot-blooded" Robert; that they knew beforehand--which they did not (59)--that Alesone would be alone and agreeable, or that they had some plan

able and compelling if they are to convince Alesone of the "verry neid" requiring their overnight lodging, which puts all of Alesone's escapades at risk. Alesone's tryst has been afforded by another chance occasion, Symon's absence. His need to seek provisions in the country has created the unexpected opportunity for Abbot Johine to abuse Symon's place. Alesone effectively, if ironically in avowed motive, disposes of the intruding Dominicans. Unfortunately, the lovers are interrupted at their play by another unexpected circumstance, Symon's return home ("Quha wenit that 3e sa lait wald haif cum hame?" 240). Symon "happens" to wish aloud for company at dinner (250); Alesone, attempting to hurry her husband to bed and her lover out the door, "happens" to refuse him (260-62); Robert "happens" to overhear and take advantage of this wish and refusal, and by coughing contrives to make their presence known in seemingly accidental fashion (264-69). Once at table Symon "happens" to wish for better fare, prodded by Allane, supplying Robert his chance to bring forth the cupboard's hidden provender unsuspected. After their feast, Symon "happens" drunkenly to grow curious about Robert's powers and source of supply, affording Robert his chance to help Johine to escape under an assumed identity (as the fiend "Hurlybass," 499-517) and simultaneously humiliate him for his wayward behaviour and intentions. This is Johine's "chance" to get safely away (he "wist na bettir wayn," for never before to "him hapnit sic a chance," 520, 525; my italics). Symon, striking the fiend with too much

to get around Symon's vigilance (unmentioned anywhere in the text, though it is suggested Symon is their friend, 295); that chaperoning each other would present no difficulties, that one would be content to do without or somehow both would share Alesone's favours (or one would corner the maid?--again unsuggested), and so on. But even if we were to accept this reading, elements of chance--the time, their condition, etc.--would play a part in the proceedings.

force, accidentally falls and brains himself on the grindingstone; Johine, propelled forward by the unexpected heavy blow, misses his footing on the stairway "And in ane myr he fell, Sic wes his hap" (535; my italics). His fall into the filthy mire below the stair was apparently a circumstance on which Robert had not counted, just as Symon's slip had taken him by surprise and caused him frantically to try reviving Symon in the fresh air (545-61). Each major comic development in the action results from chance elements, yet no turn of events is incredible. Nothing occurs that has not been prepared for or cannot be explained naturally. And though the sequence of events seems to flow because of chance occurrences, nothing "happens" that is unbelievable or extraordinary: the plot progresses with a logical inevitability. Each ironic or incongruous, but natural, turn of events marks a comic turning in the plot, and we take a high delight in its designed coincidences, its "accidental" inevitability.

Curiously, it is a tale in which everyone's prayers are answered, most ironically and with unusual alacrity; and the constant, crescendo-like fulfilment of desires often operates in conjunction with chance occurrences. Robert's first prayer, upon learning that Symon is away seeking provisions, is to wish him godspeed:

"I pray grit god him speid
him haill & sound in to his travell,"
And hir desyrit the stowp to fill of aill.

(64-66)

Not only does Robert get his ale, he gets the swift and safe return of Symon, who appears in time to prevent a cuckolding and to release the Dominicans from their position as helpless spectators in the loft. Symon's chance return home is the answer to Robert's prayers, quite literally. Alesone grants the Dominicans' prayer "for cheritie" by offering them lodging; and later she grants Johine's lascivious re-

quest, "Thairfoir, I pray 3ow be blyth and mak gud cheir" (162), by proceeding to show him a "sportand" good time. All of Symon's several desires are fulfilled once he is admitted into his own house. More than simply hungry, he swears "be all hallow / I fair rich weill and I had ane gud fallow" to bear him company (257-58); and Robert, wishing "I wald the gudman wist pat we wer heir" (264), is able to provide that fellowship, filling in when Alesone refuses him. At table Allane blesses the meal with "ser, I pray god 3ow saif"--and a case can be made that through his providential return and the Dominicans' good offices he is "saved"--by chance inspiring Symon to swear "now, be the rud, / 3it wald I gif ane croun of gold for me / for sum gud meit and drink amang ws thre!" (302-304). Robert--again in an ironic manner--is able to fulfil this request, much to Symon's astonishment. Finally, Symon wishes to view Robert's "prevy pege":

Than symone swoir and said, "be hevynnis king,
It salbe kepit prevy as for me:
Bot, bruder deir, 3our serwand wald I se."
(437-39)

In this desire, again seeded with an oath, Robert can once more oblige him; and at the same time he can allow Johine to leave, who long since "wald haif bene away" (194).

Wicked desires, such as Alesone's wish to give her "mullis" a feast of Johine's wish to be "hamely" in Symon's place, are finally thwarted. But, paradoxically, proper prayers, even insincerely spoken, are granted. In initially trying to deny the friars overnight shelter, Alesone prays

"Our deir lady mary keip [me] fra sic cace,
And keip me owt of perrell and of schame!"
(88-89; my italics)

Although her ironic prayer is falsely uttered, this prayer is nevertheless answered. The rest of the story is, in a sense, a working

out of that prayer, keeping Symon from finding out and ultimately shielding her from peril and shame, states of jeopardy into which she has placed herself.

The third significant though more subtle thematic component in governing the comic action is charity. Charity often guides a chance event or answered wish. I have already explored the tale's significant instances of charity--Alesone's "herbry," Symon's generosity, Allane's benediction, Robert's "grace" toward Alesone and especially Johine. Almost all of these instances of charity may be construed as ironic in nature, whether knowingly or inadvertently, essential contributions to the humour. Chance, answered prayer, and charity are all deeply interwoven with the agents' moral choices in the changing circumstances, comically operating in conjunction to forward the action and govern its outcome.

The Berwick-poet, as he had with comic characterization, also makes use of literary conventions as a structural device of humour, either comically playing them straight or thwarting conventional expectations. For example, it is a commonplace that pride precedes a fall and that Fortune, in the Boethian sense, usually reverses when a person is at his height, especially if the person's felicity depends on temporal gains. So it is with Abbot Johine:

Lord god gif his curage wes aboif,
 So prelat lyk sat he in to þe chyre;
 Scho rownis than ane pistill in his eir,
 Thuss sportand thame and makand melody;
 And quhen scho saw þe supper was reddy
 Scho gois belyfe and cuveris þe burde Annon,
 And syne the pair of bossis hes scho tone
 And sett þame down vpoun þe burde hir by:
 And evin with þat thay hard the gudman cry.

(182-90)

If anyone in Fortune's charge was ever ripe for a fall, Johine is it. His "prelat lyk" pride and sexual "curage" are at their zenith, but

are instantly overturned and replaced by panic at the return of Symon; unexpected, it surprises the lovers and so, comically, the reader. We delight in the sudden reversal and the confusion which follows, satisfied that the convention, in this humorous context, has proven true. Later, in departing, Johine falls literally as well as figuratively, becoming outwardly "fyld" as he is inwardly. Alesone, his love, also fulfils many of the comic conventions expected of shrewish fabliau wives.

The Berwick-poet also reverses literary conventions for fun. As we have seen, Alesone tries to put the dubiously-behaved friars off their request for lodging by citing the convention of friar lechery and her husband's suspicious jealousy with a pretence of virtue, even swearing by the Blessed Virgin. We are taken in, despite her exaggerated performance, only to be comically surprised by the revelation of the truth, that she has told lies in order to clear the way for her truly lecherous friar, her adulterous lover. She similarly deceives Symon later on. Friar Robert, conjuring up the purloined meal, upsets our expectations by not trying, "Hende Nicholas"-fashion, to legitimize his efforts with a story like a second "loaves and fishes" miracle (as plausible as a second Noah's flood) or the like. Instead, he declares it a product of black magic, which Symon stupidly believes. Alesone, heartsick that she may be found out, spends the evening with her attention riveted on Robert, as we would expect. But the language used is reminiscent of a love-struck female in a romance gazing at the object of her affections:

Scho wes so red, hir hairt was ay on flocht

 To him scho lukit oft tymes effeiritlie,
 And ay disparit in hart was scho
 That he witt of all hir purveance to;

[Thus] satt scho still, And wist no vdir wane,
 Quhat evir thay say scho lute on him [allane],
 bot scho drank with pame in to cumpany
 With fenzeit cheir and hert full wo and hevvy.
 (409, 411-17)

She blushes, her heart pounds excitedly, she looks as if she has a secret she is afraid will be discovered, and she stares only at Robert, pretending cheer, full of woe. All of this, in another context, is the language of love sickness. Yet here, psychologically appropriate given her guilt and fear, it takes on ironic dimensions.

Though the satire chiefly depends on comic characters and situational irony (e.g. Symon's welcome home, Robert's parodic feast- and fiend-raising ceremonies, Johine's slapstick punishment), the Berwick-poet also displays throughout an adept and assured comic touch in the use of verbal irony (inadvertent and deliberate in the characters' speeches), maintaining the humorous tone with a wealth of rhetorical devices. I have already commented on many lines that are ironic in themselves: for example, Alesone to Symon, "Heir is no meit pat gan- and is for 3ow" (248). One type of verbal irony, litotes, is used several times. Examples include Alesone's comment when interrupted by Symon, "3one is symone...That I micht tholit full weill had bene away" (197-98), or the narrator's remark that Johine's clothing after his fall were "nothing fair" (537; cf. also 40, 239, 288). Puns are frequently employed, often sexual double entendres and euphemisms--usually connected with Alesone--such as "sport," "hamely," "mvllis," "feist," "luvis supper," or "will"; and Robert's abusive pun "graceles gaist." Even humorous foreshadowing appears, as when Robert instructs Johine "And our pe stair Se pat thow ga gud speid" (516). The Berwick-poet makes use of a wide range of comic rhetorical colours without labouring any one of them.

One device used consistently to great effect is the comic leitmotif, in which a phrase with little or no alteration recurs in different and freshly humorous contexts, ironically changing meaning. An example was the phrase "sett 3ow doun me by," addressed to Alesone by Allane, Johine, and finally Symon. Such an ironic re-echoing is "symon is fra hame," first an explanation and an excuse to be rid of the Dominicans (61, 83), and Johine's excuse to be "hamely" with Alesone (163), and finally used by Alesone on Symon himself to put him off his guard (232). The tale is rich with comic verbal echoes of this sort, such as Alesone's two uses of her oath "Ha! benedicite!", expressing first indignation (86) and then mock surprise (368); Robert's and later Alesone's "hairt persavings" (175, 338); Johine's having a "privy postern of his awin / quhair he micht Ische quhen þat he list vnknawin" (129-30) matched by Robert's having "a pege full prevy of my awin / quhen evir I list will cum to me vnknawin" (426-27); and the use of "agast," first when the friars are interrupted at supper by the prayer-bell (76), when Symon's return shatters the play of the two lovers (192)--no one enjoys a meal in bad faith--and finally it is used to describe Symon's condition after his encounter with the "fiend" (553). The recurrent employment of set phrases, like the repetition of particular scenes and situations, is a conscious comedic effect.

Like numerous fabliaux, The Freiris of Berwik ends on an exemplary note. The narrator summarizes the results of the night's events:

Thuss Symonis heid vpoun þe stane wes brokin;
 And our þe stair the freir in myre hes loppin,
 And tap our taill he fyld wes woundir Ill;
 And Alesone on na wayiss gat hir will.
 This is the story that happnit of that freir:
 No moir thair is bot Chryst ws help most deir.
 (562-67)

Along with the narrator's obvious delight, we cannot help but notice the sermon-like quality and moralizing tone: the summary focusses on the group of "fallen" characters in the tale, specifically on their punishment. Good-hearted but stupid Symon, his own worst enemy, has received a self-inflicted skullcracking.¹⁰⁰ Alesone, active shrew and almost archetypical lecherous woman, has been thwarted from enjoying the sexual exercise she so obviously craved ("on na wayiss gat hir will"), prevented from committing adultery or freely partaking of the "luvis supper" diverted to the tale's more deserving characters, who also punish her Franciscan lover. Abbot Johine, however, is the worst offender, and on the comic fate of the apostate friar we are chiefly to focus: "This is the story that happnit of that freir." Our attention is fixed on his downfall. The proud, worldly, and luxurious Johine is the most degraded and thoroughgoing sinner of the three. Correspondingly, he has suffered, though without permanent harm, the greatest reversal. Each creates the situation for his own comic punishment. We are left approving of the justice and propriety of their respective rewards. Despite the pain inflicted, and the psychological torment endured by the wicked, neither the comic effect nor moral efficacy has been spoiled. And each of the malefactors is finally redeemable. We are reminded of that fact in the tale's last line, the benedictional invocation to the power of perfect love, a conventional expectation in both the French and in the more moral English fabliau traditions but doubtless no accidental touch.

Significantly, Friars Allane and Robert are not grouped among the

100. We are left with little hope that Symon will be any wiser for his experiences. Robert revives him and asks, "Quhat ailit 3ow to be so sore Agast?" (553); Symon assumes the fiend has somehow levelled him: "He said, '3one [fiend] hes maid me [in effray]'," (554).

fallen characters at all in the epilogue. These lines stress the just punishment meted out to the flawed agents; and the Dominicans, the comic heroes, clearly do not belong among them. In terms of both the anti-mendicant satiric tradition and the fabliau tradition the Dominicans remain relatively unsullied and admirable throughout the poem.

Before drawing final conclusions as to the fabliau's satiric direction, however, it is useful to compare briefly The Freiris of Berwik with its closest known analogue, Le Povre Clerc.¹⁰¹ Although the earlier French tale is not near enough to be considered unreservedly the source for the Berwick-poet, nevertheless comparing the two versions of the story can serve a purpose. We get a better idea of the Berwick-poet's skill, tone, and aims in considering his treatment of the same basic materials and theme.

In Le Povre Clerc a poor scholar is forced by penury to leave school in Paris. On his way home, penniless and hungry, he begs food and shelter in the name of "charity" of a goodwife, who mercilessly refuses his request and turns him away, though he saw plainly a sumptuous meal being prepared. On his way out he meets a priest, disguised in a cloak, entering. Bemoaning his fate further down the road, he meets a farmer returning from the mill, the lady's husband, who invites him home to supper. Surprised, the woman hides the priest, then lets them enter. While food is being prepared, fare much less appetizing than that the wife has hidden, the husband asks the clerk to sing or tell a story. In the clerk's pretended story of a wolf falling on a pig and devouring it he contrives to reveal the wife's hidden feast (the pig is as big as the cake he saw the servant bake earlier, its

101. Ed. Montaiglon and Raynaud, op. cit., V, 192-200.

blood as red as the wine previously brought in, etc.). He finally exposes the hidden priest to the husband, who, enraged, strips the priest and beats him (giving the cloak to the clerk), then beats his faithless wife. The story ends with a moralizing epilogue to the effect that "you should not turn away strangers even if you expect never to see them again."

Obviously, The Freiris of Berwik's expanded plot differs from this in several major respects. But in examining the differences between them it is important to notice that the basic elements are there: Le Povre Clerc concerns a love-triangle broken up by an intelligent outside force; the clerk asks the wife for charity but is turned away (that he might desire her sexually is never at issue); the clerk discovers what the husband has not, the adulterous relationship between the wife and the priest, who are planning an intimate meal; befriended by the husband, the clerk wittily manages to divert the illicit feast to their own table, humiliating the wife; the clerk is responsible for the exposure and punishment of the hidden priest-lover; and, finally, the tale ends, as does The Freiris of Berwik, with a moralizing epilogue.

In the manner of Chaucer, and in Chaucer's decasyllabic couplets, the Berwick-poet recasts these elements into a new story with consummate skill. He particularizes the setting with an elaborate introduction; he names his characters and gives them at least rudimentary personality traits, expanding each character's part (Abbot Johine especially) with more dialogue, inner monologue, and enlarged action, all character-revealing. He takes pains to ensure both the credibility of the plot and the psychological verisimilitude of his characters, so that their actions and reactions, and the final outcome of the story,

seem logically inevitable without being predictable; and he concentrates on the poetic justice of the various pains finally meted out. Also, like Chaucer, he skilfully blends motifs from other sources, such as expanding the comic possibilities of Alesone's delaying tactics when surprised by Symon or incorporating the magical conjurations of the "sham-magician" motif from folklore and derivative tales, into an organic whole.

Several of the Berwick-poet's redactions warrant our attention, especially in relation to the friars and the poet's satiric intentions. The characters of the wife and husband remain basically the same, if fuller personalities; but in place of the poor clerk are two Dominican friars (although Robert is still a clerk from Paris), and the priest-lover has become an obviously contemptible Franciscan abbot, a man of importance from a rival order. Surely this is no insignificant coincidence. As in Le Povre Clerc, the husband generously befriends the two Dominicans (they seem to know each other already); but they are found in his house because Alesone has, however reluctantly, admitted them in the name of charity. This act places the friars in her debt; and, unlike Le Povre Clerc's mistress, who is embarrassed, humiliated, and finally beaten, Alesone's secrets are thereby safeguarded. Though she suffers mental anguish, she is not exposed. This forces our attention on Friar Johine, who by comparison suffers extensively and alone. Revenge is the clerk's motive for exposing the wife and her priest-lover to the farmer's wrath; and though the wife is obliged to set their table with her supper because of his story, we are never given to understand that the clerk enjoys so much as a single bite of the meal he forces out of her before exposing her and helping to beat the priest. Robert and Allane, by contrast, happily seize the oppor-

tunity to eat and drink the night through. Johine's punishment comes about rather as an inspired afterthought than a carefully planned trick, and even then his identity is shielded. Vengeance is at best disputable as Robert's guiding motive, and it must be allowed that his justice is tempered with a mercy wholly lacking in his clerkly counterpart. In the clerk's punishment, the wife's lies are exploded and her lover revealed to her husband, who beats them both; in Robert's, the wife's mis-"govirnance" is protected and we concentrate on the humiliating punishment of the miscreant friar. Alesone is not physically mistreated at all, but Symon, for his folly, accidentally is punished; and the lovers' secrets are kept from the husband. The moralitas of Le Povre Clerc may be described at best as "wry," if not cynical: as an example it serves more as an advertisement for wandering scholars, attempting, however unendearingly, to ensure their welcome in strange households. The Berwick-poet's moral epilogue can justly be described as exemplary, pointing out the poetic justice of the defeat of its misdoers and warning others from similar folly. It satirizes the wicked and foolish, particularly the Franciscans, in the person of Abbot Johine, a notable shift in bias.

It is not then a tale in which all the friars, as we might normally expect, are fully satirized. The Dominicans, especially as initially presented (and I have argued that this is set up deliberately in order to comically reverse expectations), are by no means perfect friars; but only Johine is satirically condemned. In the Lawrear's public house, in a sense a microcosm of the world, a testing ground of spirituality, the Franciscans badly fail and the Dominicans do not. We have seen a natural antipathy between the two orders, and the joke on the Franciscans is as uproariously good as it is thorough. Berwick's highest-

ranking Franciscan, Johine is a lower sort of creature than either of the other two friars, a figure of ridiculousness: he is lecherous, but denied his satisfaction; gluttonous, but denied even a mouthful of the feast he himself provided; "renowned," but afraid to show himself; timorous, but finally beaten and mud- and filth-drenched; proud, but in the end utterly disgraced and humbled, transformed from a "respectable" Franciscan superior into the servile fiend "Hurlybass," and in that avatar clubbed and ignominiously cast out, thoroughly chagrined. His reversal is complete. And as he is unsympathetic, we admire Robert's ready wit, sense of poetic justice, and ironic sense of humour.

In fact, by any contemporary standard, the Dominicans are made to look as good as Johine is bad, given the fabliau context. William of St.-Amours' friar-criticisms in De periculis are one standard. The general ideals of the mendicant orders are another: Robert and Allane, accidentally feasted, remain poor and chaste if not altogether obedient. The same cannot be said of Johine. The apostolic goals of the mendicants supply a third: Allane and Robert are initially, at least, depicted as carrying out the ministerial ideals of their order in accordance with its regulations; not once does their Franciscan rival function according to his office or profession, rather he parodies it. Even in dealings with women the Dominicans have the decency to meet "wyffis" in the open during daylight hours rather than sneaking to secret assignations at night in undeniable illicit relationships. And the fabliau tradition itself provides a fourth basis of comparison. Robert is heroic, witty, admirable, and successful, in his role as the Wily Clerk assuming the traditional dominance of clerks over inept and contemptible priest-lovers. Johine is a one-dimensional and caricature-like personality, clearly taking his place with the "stupid

beasts" of fabliaux, the foolish prêtre amants. The satire on the mendicants follows a decidedly anti-Franciscan bias.

All of this serves to prove that The Freiris of Berwik, satirizing the Franciscans in particular and wickedness and folly in general, is a "moral" fabliau in the mould of the late English tradition, combining the basic features of French fabliaux with Chaucerian narrative skill and the ethical character of the majority of surviving non-Chaucerian English fabliaux. It is "orthodox" in its immorality: it is not lewd, though it is bawdy, and almost incidentally touches on "the animal facts of life." The pain inflicted is not excessive and its justice is fitting: the tale carries a moralizing summary drawing our attention to the punishment handed out where deserved, especially to Abbot Johine ("this is the story that happnit of that freir"). Finally, in accordance with the English tradition, it is a fabliau on the side of marital fidelity and harmony, and no celebration of discreet alliances as in the older and more cynical French tales. As narratives, fabliaux are necessarily direct. If it was the purpose of the tale to show that the intelligent man will enjoy the lady's favours, to put Robert in bed with Alesone in place of both Symon and Johine, then that would happen. But it does not. Rather, the illicit affair is broken up before fruition, and its participants tormented or punished. In protecting Alesone's secret, marital strife, which might threaten the union, is avoided; and by the same token Robert's knowledge of her "govirnance" acts as a surety against further attempts to cuckold Symon, while Johine's discovery and ill-treatment almost certainly guarantees that the Lawrears will no longer be troubled with Franciscan fiends ("he salbe laith to cum agane"). The tale goes to considerable lengths to set the Lawrears' marriage on the righteous path again, even

though following the character types of general lines of French fabliaux concerned with triangular love relationships. Late, one of the only attempts to "continue the tradition of the Canterbury Tales" with ability and humour not unworthy of Chaucer, The Freiris of Berwik is a masterfully executed fabliau, a "classic" example of the genre and synthesis of both the French and English traditions.

ii. The Wyf of Auchtermwchty

The 120-line Wyf of Auchtermwchty¹⁰² is a mid-sixteenth century Scottish fabliau attributed to Mofat.¹⁰³ Akin to the non-Chaucerian English tradition, like The Freiris of Berwik the scene is still domestic; but marital stability, not marital fidelity, is at issue, a satire on the battle of the sexes for household sovereignty.

102. I refer to Bannatyne, II, 320-24; I have supplied some punctuation. The poem, in 8-line octosyllabic stanzas, has formal affinities with the ballad tradition. It is executed without care, or has suffered in transcription: cf. rhymes, lines 10-12, 29-31, 37-39, 50-52, 57-59, 77-79, 81-83, 89-91, 97-99, and 117-119. The motif of the husband and wife reversing work roles was apparently a popular one. Citing the Latin analogue Silva Sermonum jucundissimorum (1565) set in Prussia, David Laing, ed. Select Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of Scotland, rev. W. Carew Hazlitt, 2 vols., (London: 1895), II, 47-51, notes that "few poems of the same nature have oftener been reprinted."

103. Ritchie, in editing Bannatyne, II, 324, points out that the attribution to Mofat is "in a much later hand," casting some doubt on that attribution. Roderick Lyall, "Narrative Technique and Moral Purpose in Middle Scots Poetry," (Unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow, 1979), 140 n.93, posits a possible identification with one "Sir John Moffat (or 'de Monte Fixo') who was Master of the grammar school in Dumfermline in 1519, and who was still active as a notary public in 1525." Moffat seems to have died by 1530. Denton Fox, The Poems of Robert Henryson, (Oxford: 1981), xvi-xvii, briefly makes the same tentative suggestion. But Earl F. Guy, "Some Comic and Burlesque Poems in Two Sixteenth Century Scottish Manuscript Anthologies," (Unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1952), 259-64, argues from linguistic evidence for a date of composition between 1530 and 1568, favouring a date after mid-century.

Like fabliau of the French tradition, the poem is characterized by brevity, liveliness, swift pacing, dependence on unadorned and uncomplicated plot, and an obvious intention to invoke laughter for its own sake in an audience. Characterization is minimal, defined in action rather than in static description (the principals are given only sketchy physical details, and are not even named); and, unlike The Freiris of Berwik, dialogue occupies well under a third of the whole tale. The foolish, envious husband and the clever, shrewish wife are conventional characters--notably the wife as the treacherous, brawling spouse. Yet, despite their spare characterization, they are imbued with an inner vivacity. Mofat relies on psychological verisimilitude to animate the pair. The motivations of both are clear, as we see into their thought processes at each stage of the action: the husbandman's anger at his wife's life of ease, and comic jealousy in ordering that they exchange jobs, is understandable; during the course of his day as "hussy" (20) he "thinks" to strike the sow or wash the sheets only to be continually disappointed; though aware of his wife's deceits and desires he surrenders shamefully in the end; and finally, staging a judicious retreat mixing cowardice and philosophical resignation, he avoids fisticuffs with his wife. His wife's mental processes are likewise plainly evident. She slyly complies with his initial demands without a struggle, secretly assuring her success through treachery. Later, allowing her husband to linger in defeat, she employs reverse psychology against him, attempting to secure forever her desired office.

The Wyf of Auchtermwchty, however, avoids the gratuitous cruelty of many French fabliaux. Allied to the English tradition, the fabliau concludes on a note of peace and marital harmony in lieu of a knock-down fight and domestic discord. Their marriage is treated satirically

but not cynically. The ethical Anglo-Scottish temperament once again protects the institution of matrimony, however comically.

A brief comparison with the earlier analogous English tale, the anonymous Ballad of the Tyrannical Husband,¹⁰⁴ serves to illustrate the poem's thematic development as well as to show the compression which the narrative materials have undergone in Mofat's version of the story. Clearly the two poems relate the same basic story, as many details of plot closely correspond. Only a fragment of The Tyrannical Husband survives (one "fytte"--108 lines--out of a possible two or more fyttes), but if complete it would be at least twice as long as Mofat's poem. Its invocation to Christ and woman-flattering 10-line address to the audience introducing its matter indicate that The Tyrannical Husband was intended for public recitation, possibly by a travelling minstrel (who concludes the first fytte by hinting "And I had dronke ones, ye shalle heyre the best behynd," 108). The Tyrannical Husband is pro-feminist, told for the sake of Jhesu's "dame," lauding "all women." Consequently, idealizing the heroine to a degree, the poem is slower paced, more sober in tone, and to an extent sacrifices comic potential in order to strengthen the moral point.

Characterization in The Tyrannical Husband is as terse as in The Wyf of Auchtirmwchty: compare "She was a good huswyfe, curteys and heynd, / And he was an angry man, and sone wold be teynd" with the weatherbeaten Fifeshire farmer seeing his "wyf baith dry and clene, / And sittand at ane fyre beikand bawld / With ane fat sowlp."¹⁰⁵ But

104. G. Wright and O. Halliwell, eds. Reliquae Antiquae, (London: 1843), 196-99. The editors note that the anonymous composition is "from a MS. on paper of the reign of Henry VII, preserved in the Chetham Library at Manchester."

105. Character sketches are at times equally economical in The Freiris of Berwik: "robert wes young and verry hett of blude...strong and

its setting is more elaborate, with more than half of the ballad as it survives consisting of dialogue between husband and wife, a series of choleric recriminations and plaintive defences. What requires eighty lines to set the stage in The Tyrannical Husband is compressed into twenty effective, almost telegraphic lines in The Wyf of Auchtermwchty. Mofat's opening stanza succinctly "places" us in the tale's situation, including a significant weather report, enumerating the husbandman's locale, occupation, and, briefly, character:

In awchtermwchty thair dwelt ane man,
 ane husband As I hard it tawld,
 guha weill cowl'd tippill owt a can,
 And napir luvit hungir nor cawld.
 Quhill anis it fell vpoun a day
 He 3okkit his plwch vpoun the plane;
 Gif it be trew, as I hard say,
 the day was fowll for wind and rane.

(1-8)

The reader is plunged directly into the matter of the tale, and we are realistically prepared for the cold, wet, and weary husbandman's outrage at finding his wife comfortably enjoying herself. Given the contrast between his pleasure-loving inclinations and actual condition, and his wife's cummer-like ease,¹⁰⁶ we instantly expect a conflict between them. This demonstrable rage is much more pointed and natural than The Tyrannical Husband's weak and artificial attribution of the husband's anger to his humour-governed personal make-up, a less credible occasion for conflict. The Scottish husbandman's real pique, by contrast, is expressed in only one angry--and seemingly selfless--question before he demands that his wife exchange places with him:

wicht" (41-43). But descriptions of Abbot Johine and especially Alesone are more fulsome.

106. The wife's sipping at "ane fatt sowp" (14) contrasts directly with his love of "tippling out of a can." The goodwife of Auchtermwchty bears a resemblance to Dunbar's "lean" gossips complaining of Lent's hardships in "Tway Cummeris." See Dunbar, 197-98, ll. 4-7.

Quhoth he, "quhair is my horssis corne?
 My ox hes napir hay nor stray.
 Dame, 3e mon to be pluch to morne!
 I salbe hussy gif I may."
 "husband," quoth scho, "content am I
 To tak be pluche my day abowt,
 sa 3e will rowll baith kavis & ky,
 And all the houss baith in and owt."

(17-24)

In The Tyrannical Husband, the berated wife's detailed defensive complaints are unjustly ignored by her mate, and so she seizes the chance to trade occupations in order to teach him a lesson. The irony is much subtler in The Wyf of Auchtermwchty: the wife, untroubled by her husband's accusations, does not bother to defend herself or argue with him. We understand, therefore, that her ease is real and that her situation is to be coveted. Her husband's assessment is correct; and her quick compliance is merely the first step in comically tricking him into believing otherwise. The poet of The Tyrannical Husband attempts to relate a humorous but primarily exemplary tale defending women. Mofat, not bound by this restriction, creates a decidedly more shrewish wife but also a much stronger character than his English counterpart.

Her husband is comically unsuspecting about her ready compliance. But she is secretive, cunning, and shrewdly selfish, and obviously plans to defend herself, ironically expecting only to have to plough "my day abowt." She marshalls both brains and brawn to her defence. Initially she relies on treacherous guile--sabotage and bribery--in the comic pursuit of her will. She cleans out the churn, thereby ruining her husband's butter-making efforts (35-36); further,

in the mornyng vp scho gatt,
 and on hir hairt laid hir disiwne;
 scho put alsmeikle in hir lap
 As micht haif serd thame baith at nwne.

Sayis, "Iok, will thow be maistir of wark,

And thow sall had, and I sall kall?
 Iss promiseiss the ane gud new sark."
 (37-43)

Cheating, she goes to lengths to ensure her own comfort and success. She takes a hearty lunch; and the phrase suggests that she deprives her husband of his noontime meal. In addition, she strikes a bargain with their labourer, Jok:¹⁰⁷ if he will "had" (guide the plough), she will take his job and "kall" (drive the oxen with a goadstaff). She continues to depend on her wits later, when, satisfied her spouse is vanquished, she comically ignores his cries of surrender (the parallelism of "scho hard him, and scho hard him not" comically echoes his pleas "On hir to cray, on hir to schowt," 98-99). This increases his anxiety and prepares for her ironic refusal to resume her old station.

Though hers is a clever effort at reverse psychology, her husband, suspecting that he has been gulled, calls her bluff:

quothe scho, "weill mot 3e bruke [the] place,
 for trewlie I will nevir excep it."
 quothe he, "feind fall the lyaris face,
 bot 3it 3e may be blyth to get it."
 (109-112)

She is caught in a lie and insulted, and so provoked to violence. When her last trick fails, she finally relies on her physical prowess, comically overthrowing wit by resorting to blows. Threatened by her "mekle rung," the husbandman

maid to the dur.
 quothe he, "deme, I sall hald my tung,
 for and we fecht I [w]ill gett the woir."
 (114-16)

107. Jok's sudden appearance is ill-prepared for and unexpected. His relation to the farmer is much clearer in The Tyrannical Husband: the husband, ordering his wife into the fields, declares "To morow with my lade to the plowe thou shalt gone" (82; my italics). Jok's sole purpose is to help establish the wife's treachery, and immediately after he fulfils that purpose he silently disappears again.

He recognizes her superior strength in domestic brawling, and acknowledges her ascendancy in their comic guerilla war for marital "mastery." She belongs to the satiric anti-feminist tradition of kitchen bullies, a tradition exemplified by the Wife of Bath. She overmatches her husband both physically and intellectually, "naturally" triumphing over her weaker mate. Their trial male-female role-reversal paradoxically reveals the actual dominance pattern in their marriage relationship, female over male.

Her husband, of course, contributes tirelessly to his own defeat, and there is much of the slapstick buffoon about the mercurial farmer. He is as slow-witted as he is quick-tempered, proving thoroughly incompetent in executing what should be, ironically, simple household chores. Conditions and housekeeping instructions accompany his wife's too-agreeable surrender (23-32); she also slyly reminds him of the "deir ferme" (30) on their land, comically hinting at the cost of any mistakes. Each labour she names will provide the basis for his failures. That is, these chores serve as comic leitmotifs, setting up expectations and preparing the reader for what will go wrong later, supplying standards against which to measure his performance. A gled kills five of the seven geese, the calf milks the cow, he fails to make butter, he burns all the firewood at once: each of her commands misfires disastrously, fulfilling comic expectations. And, in addition to anger and frustrated anxiety, he suffers physical injury as well (60, 63).

His beliefs echo and supplement the comic leitmotifs in her instructions, strengthening the situational irony. Literally running (53, 58, 61, 65) from one small catastrophe to the next, the husband-man suffers a day of continually betrayed intentions and expectations.

He thinks to have something done this way or that only to be comically thwarted by reality: he "thocht to hitt the sow ane rowt" (78), but instead slays the two surviving goslings; he "thocht to haif fund [the bairnis] fair and clene" (86), but they are "all bedirtin to the Ene" (88); he "thocht to haif wescht [the scheitis] on ane stane" (94), but loses them in the flooded river. Even his capitulation is comically suspended as his wife ignores his shouts and finishes her day in the fields. Mofat creates a crescendo effect of humorously spoiled hopes, a crescendo sustained by the relentless pace of the action. Every few lines concerning his activities begins with "then," which has the effect of compressing time and speeding up events: "than owt he ran in all his mane" (53); "than by thair cumis an ill willy cow" (59); "than hame he ran to ane rok of tow" (61); "than to be kyrn pat he did stoure" (65); and so on (55, 73, 81, 85, 97). He races through the destruction of house and chattel with an infallibly bungling touch. The day is summed up from his wife's point of view: "scho fand all wrang that sowld bene richt" (103). Ironically, this represents the fulfilment of her hopes.

There is also a seeming conspiracy of natural forces against the husbandman's every effort. His wife, who is at pains to ensure her own success, does relatively little to sabotage him in comparison with what actually goes awry. Much happens that depends on circumstances beyond her powers to command, or her husband's powers to foresee. The farmer is careless and inept, but above all he is accident-prone. In cleaning up after his children, for example, his attempt to wash the "fowll scheitis" in the river is unexpectedly crossed when the burn, "rissin grit of spait" (95-96), carries them downstream. His failures often result from incompetence combined with forces beyond his control,

actions comically upset by the wedding of ignorance and especially accident. He is continually victimized by chance. As in The Freiris of Berwik, chance plays a prominent part in the comic action, providing surprise fulfilments of mishaps both foreshadowed, such as the "gredy gled's" sudden arrival (49-52), and those which, like the lost sheets, are unexpected but logically inevitable. In The Dumb Wife, by contrast, nothing in the plotting is left to chance.

The "I"-narrator breaks in with commentary often enough to be considered a third character. His involvement is peripheral, but his shifting perspective works to control the tone and shape our perceptions of the action. We are allowed to see into the characters' minds, omniscience necessary in order that we might delineate the comic disparity between their beliefs and reality. In addition, the narrator supplies several kinds of editorial comment, supplementing insight. His first remarks establish him as a hearsay witness: "As I hard it tawld" (2), and "Gif it be trew as I hard say" (7). These throw-away lines have the dual effect of distancing the listener from the story and founding the narrator's credibility. But this cautious "overview" alters as the narrator--sweeping us along--becomes more involved, when for example he curses the wife at the characters' level: "I pray god gif hir evill to fair" (34). Later, he becomes an accurate witness, providing a host of comic details: for example,

3it he wes cummerit with the kyrne,
And syne he het the milk our hett,
And sorrow spark of it wald 3yrne.
(70-72)

Still affecting a hearsay position, however, he offers correct "beliefs" about the action which on a broad level contrast ironically with the inevitably mistaken "thoughts" of the farmer: for instance,

"I trow he lowtit our neir the low" (63, light word-play); "I trow the man thocht richt grit schame" (104)--and here he becomes a guide to thought; or "I trow he cund hir littill thank" (74).¹⁰⁸ This last instance typifies the flavour of his other editorial remarks. The farmer himself once ironically understates the case when he notes, after diverse mishaps and injuries, "this wark hes ill begynning" (64). Litotes, however, is usually left to the narrator: "betwene that tway It was na play" (16); or "that day he had na will to mow" (84). The use of litotes comically balances exaggeration in the speed and magnitude of events.

Mofat, as noted, employs comic foreshadowing, crescendo effects, ironic reversals, and litotes, though little other word-play. On the whole, slapstick humour, calling down the laughter of superiority, outweighs irony and the laughter of incongruity. It is worth noting that Mofat makes use of one further rhetorical device that enhances comic structure, misdirection; and this instance of comic misdirection combines physical humour with an ironic reversal. Searching for food, their "gredy sow" (73) wanders into the house, and in a rage the husbandman

cleikit vp ane crukit club
and thocht to hitt the sow ane rowt;
the twa gaislings the gled had left,
that struck, dang baith their harnis owt!

(77-80)

A cruel irony, he himself is responsible for destroying the last of the geese. The two goslings, survivors of the day's first mistake,

108. When the husbandman finally uses the "I"-narrator's expression "I trow" ("I trow I bot forsuk my seill," 117-18) it represents the first time that day he was not mistaken. The narrator and the farmer are rhetorically allied in their use of litotes, and in the use of the phrase "I trow."

have been completely forgotten by this time, much as in Chaucer's Miller's Tale John the Carpenter is forgotten asleep in his wooden tub while Alisone, Nicholas, and Absalom play tricks on each other. Our attention is diverted elsewhere. Bringing the forgotten goslings back into the story has the same humorous effect, on a minor scale, as returning suddenly to old John in the barn rafters when Nicholas shouts "Water!" This episode, including an unexpected reversal, slapstick comedy, chance and human error, and recalling a comic leitmotif, encapsulates the poem's multivalent strategy of humour.

Finally, it is worth remarking that the apparent anti-feminism of Mofat's poem is less straightforward than it seems. The Wyf of Auchtermwchty ends on a note of compromising truce: the husbandman accepts the status quo, and, with it, defeat. As mentioned, we are to take it that the poem belongs to the satiric anti-feminist tradition, for the domineering wife ends victorious, and she displays traits that ally her with comic shrews of that tradition. At one point the narrator even calls down a blatantly editorial curse, "I pray god gif hir evill to fair," an act of misogynistic participation that directly affirms satiric intent. Yet there is an ambiguous quality about Mofat's overall satiric direction. The wife, though she cheats unfairly, and craftily tricks and torments her mate somewhat, behaves with moderation and does not overdo her sabotage or her shrewishness. Chance plays a stronger part in the day's outcome than any manipulations of her own; she therefore cannot truly be considered a wit-figure. And her husband is equally ludicrous and ridiculous, not a true butt-figure because he is self-defeated and not actually gulled. He is an inept buffoon in the home environment, ignorant and unlucky, and so himself liable for much satiric blame in failing at "woman's work." He

is victimized much more by his own folly and unyielding natural circumstances than by feminine treachery. Yet because he tries hard and does not discourage easily in the face of adversity he remains, like his wife, sympathetic despite his flaws. Neither partner's faults are excessive, and seem to balance against one another; consequently, the humour, though dominated by superiority laughter, is gentler on the whole than we might normally expect from the genre. Further, the husbandman achieves a sort of wisdom: in the end he does not claim that his wife cheated him but justly blames himself (117-20), forestalling violence with his wife as they effect at last a reconciliation. We do not finally feel that he suffers more than he deserves, or suffers worse treatment at his wife's hands than at his own. The anti-feminist satire is therefore mitigated to a considerable degree.

iii. The Dumb Wife

The satiric fantasy of The Dumb Wife¹⁰⁹ has much in common with

109. The anonymous, mid-sixteenth century poem, resembling a folktale in theme and form (hexasyllabic ballad stanzas), is found in The Maitland Folio, I 69-70 and II 66-68. I have added some punctuation. Craigie (II, 10) believes one leaf (six stanzas, or 76 lines) has been torn out; and the opening four lines are wanting. The loss of an entire leaf seems too much, although the poem is obviously fragmented. The missing portions can be imagined with little difficulty, however. Compare the beginning of the analogous prose tale "Of the man that had the dome wyfe," No. 62 in Shakespeare's Jest Book, A C. Mery Talys, ed. Hermann Oesterley, (London: 1866), 107-109: "There was a man that maryed a woman whiche hath [sic] grete ryches & bewte / how be it she had suche an impedymment of nature that she was dome and woude not speke / whiche thyng made hym full ofte to be ryght pensyfyte & sad...." In his edition of the poem, Laing, Select Remains, op. cit., II, 28-33, felt that "the only deficiency which we are left to regret is that of the first four lines." Laing, perhaps remembering "a vulgar Scottish [sic] ballad of a similar kind which never seems to have been printed" (II, 28), supplies the title of "Ane Ballet shewing how a Dumb Wyff was maid to speik." There seems to be no justification for this ascription. I have followed Craigie in giving it a modern English title, as it is untitled in the MS.

The Wyf of Auchtermwchty, not least in its character types and final marriage-affirming resolution. The theme of anti-feminism is stronger in The Dumb Wife, but here again the misogynistic satire is softened in large measure by the husband's culpable stupidity. In its substance and treatment the poem is undoubtedly fabliau material: the scene is again domestic and bourgeois, concerning a man who, with fiendish assistance, cures his wife of muteness but comes to regret it. The Dumb Wife depends on irony, incongruous laughter, to a greater extent than does The Wyf of Auchtermwchty; and it is closer to the French tradition in that a cynical attitude toward marriage seems to prevail.¹¹⁰

This cynicism is most evident in the devil's speeches (42-43, 95-128), and in the poem's comic burden: that the husband has no chance of achieving marital "bliss" (46), but only rarely peace, and that he must learn to make the best of a poor compromise ("Thair is na leid in Land / That hes as I wald haif: / His wyff at his command," 134-36). The implied anti-feminist judgment, the "given" element of the humour, is that no husband can expect to be completely happy:¹¹¹ "wyffis," as the devil explains, "will haue yair will," for a woman's "tounge is hir wapin" (123-25). These female qualities, though "wilful," are des-

110. One well-known, and cynical, French analogue is Moliere's Le Medecin Malgré Lui. In it, Sganarelle likewise explains to the distressed husband that the cure for dumbness cannot be reversed; but the worthy doctor does offer to make the husband deaf.

111. Early on, however, the narrator--in what is possibly the poem's only editorial comment--reports that some husbands are happily married (1-2). If so, this partially nullifies the husband's final lesson. But we are unsure whether the narrator is reporting fact or the husband's rather naive beliefs. In either case, because the husband finally believes "no man controls his wife" to be true--and I take it that the audience is expected to agree with the comic cliché--there is at least some kind of comic misery-loves-company comfort available to him if not a genuine reason for learning to be patient with his wife.

cribed by the devil in terms of natural fact, not deliberate maliciousness but rather a perversity that is elemental and cannot be helped, part of the nature of the beast. His matter-of-factness can be interpreted sardonically; or, more charitably, as normal in human affairs--after all, the postlapsarian world is both flawed and imperfectable by mankind. But however one understands the devil's explanation of women, the fallen nature of the world is something the husband ought to have known. The poet does not dwell on this ironic "given." Rather he focusses on the husband's folly, selfishness, and false values in the process of detailing his domestic education. The wife is merely, and "naturally," flawed. But the husband is actively at fault, displaying ignorance in romantic idealism, and extreme folly--not to mention potential damnability--in his attempts to remedy his unhappiness. He is far more blameworthy. And the poem finally concludes on a positive note, further qualifying the anti-feminist satire. Like The Wyf of Auchtermwchty, The Dumb Wife--though a comically troubled vision of matrimony--resolves harmoniously, with the husband justly accepting the blame and earning enough wisdom to make his life tolerable. By protecting the sanctity of marriage, The Dumb Wife adheres to the substantially ethical Anglo-Scottish fabliau tradition.

Because the fabliau primarily concerns the husband's education, his wife, as a character, is pushed into the background. Characterization, as is usual in the genre, is quite spare: no one is named; only the devil is provided with a rudimentary physical description ("ane grit grim man," 12); and the characters are defined almost entirely in (reported) dialogue, the bulk of which issues from the fiend. The wife's guiding humour is muteness, which, alleviated, transmutes into shrewishness. She is regarded as an object, a comical force of

nature, rather than as a real personality. We never glimpse into her thoughts or feel her emotions; indeed, she seems to have no motivation at all. She is comic--in the Bergsonian sense--in that, though living, she seems to be a mechanical creature, an object possessed of irritating fixed traits. Comically mindless, she passes instantaneously from pensive silence to the opposite comic extreme, crabbedness. Her husband, anticipating the "bliss"-ful restoration of her speech, is unable to sleep for excitement (57-58); and his tossing and turning in bed humorously foreshadows his future restive state. Our comic expectations are instantly fulfilled when his anxious efforts are rewarded with an unfortunate success, shrewish words:

The first word yat scho spak
Scho said, "ewill mot 3e fair,
That wald not lat me rest,
And I sa seik yis nicht!"
for Ioy he hir imbraist,
his hairt was hie on hicht.
Than furth scho shew all yat scho knew
quhan that scho sould not speik:
Fra scho began scho spairit not than
And litill till ane seik.

(59-68)

Selfish, she shows no whit of gratitude, but speaks to him as if she had been able to talk her whole life, picking up the conversation, as it were, where she left off the day before. She more than repays him for disturbing her. Ironically, she assumes the behaviour "normal" for a married woman, as the devil predicted; and, granted the use of her sharp tongue, she becomes more than a match for her husband, quarrelling and scolding.

Still comically ignorant, however, the husband does not at first realize what he has wrought. The poet sustains the comic potential of his delayed discovery, disappointment, then horror. Despite her first harsh words his immediate reaction is to be overjoyed, and he embraces

her like a prodigal child returned. But his happiness is quickly overthrown. Though there is an obvious break in the manuscript, it is evident that discord and strife settle on their household in short order.¹¹² When the action resumes we are therefore not surprised to find the husband complaining with comic bitterness--his patently foolish expectations are entirely reversed--to the fiend who first supplied the cure:

"And quhen I did hir pray
In licence for to sitt,
That is the neirhand way
To put hir by hir witt.
God knawis ye drerie Lyff
I had sen scho was dum;
Off ane gud quyet wyff
Is now ane feind [becum]!"
(69-76)

Her very first use of speech is to wish evil on her spouse, a role she is able to fulfil herself. She acts out directly what the fiend indirectly wishes on him. In this sense, she becomes a comic agent of Hell; and in fact she becomes more hellish to live with than a host of devils. Ironically, she compares unfavourably with the fiend who counselled her husband.

Both the devil and the wife link the husband with damnation, in this life and possibly the next. But the devil represents a comic inversion of the wife's qualities. It is he, ironically, who offers the husband verbal "comfort," as he craves (1-4). Instead of a horrible and demonic being, he seems solicitous, kind, even selfless, lending

112. Again compare Oesterley, op. cit., 108: "But in conclusion her speche so encreased day by day / and she was so curste of condycyon / that every daye she brauled and chydde with her husbände so moche / that at the last he was more vexed / and hadde moche more trouble and disease with her shrewde wordes than he hadded before whan she was dome."

a sympathetic ear and friendly advice. It is, of course, a common trick for the devil to assume a pleasing shape. The husband's anguish at having a mute wife is comically exaggerated: "his eirdlie Ioy is turnit to noy, / he wist him self war deid" (29-30). But though exaggerated, it points accurately toward his perilous condition. He is heedless of both true marital felicity and his spiritual needs, ripe for an encounter with fiendish powers: their "chance" (12) meeting seems anything but accidental. His devil-confidante, in an apparently incongruous move, turns his thoughts from suicide with suggestions of certain "remeid" (32). Paradoxically, this "cure" affords a greater hell on earth, a kind of living death, for the husband.

Comic encounters between mortals and devils are common enough in medieval literature--indeed, the central fiend-raising episode of The Freiris of Berwik presupposes such occasions. The devil-type most often encountered is more like the green-clad travelling companion of the wicked Summoner in Chaucer's Friar's Tale than the posturing "grim man" of The Dumb Wife. But here, as in Chaucer, the devil meets an obviously ripe potential client and simply waits, presenting his foolish prey with an opportunity to doom himself. He is, then, a confidence trickster, a silver-tongued tempter who, while ironically keeping up the appearance of compassion, sagacity, and honesty, lures the silly husband from his initial happy state¹¹³ into torment. The devil's sense of restraint and fair play therefore require comment. His "counsell" seems to be straightforward. He details exactly how to im-

113. One can argue, of course, that being happy without realizing it is not to be happy at all. But the husband regrets the loss of his former peace, of his "gud quyet wyff" (75). This suggests that he enjoyed marital "bliss" without recognizing it. His hindsight arises from a comparison with real vexation and misery.

plement a magic herbal remedy (35-40); and, along with the prescription, he gives the husband fair warning of the results: "scho sall spek out, haif thow na dout, / And mair than thow desyreis" (43-44; my italics). (We notice also the devil's inferior "thow"-address, indicating their master-thrall relationship.) His prophecy is correct, comically implying that his worldview is the true one; and in the final analysis he eventually does give the husband some "remeid" in terms of that worldview. But, comically, he tells only a partial truth: he accurately warns of the results, yet makes no mention of the full, infelicitous consequences of the cure. He knows in advance, as the sensible reader does, what the humorous effect of the medicine will be. He tricks the husband, but only insofar as the husband is a willing gull; ironically, he does not have to deceive him. The husband is impervious to warnings. The fiend expects that the husband's lack of understanding and temporal attachments will drive him further into error and misery. The husband then has only himself to reproach for breaking faith by disregarding the devil's instructions and plain caveat, compounding the incongruity of the situation.

The poem's misogynistic joke, the wildly exaggerated unflattering portrait of the wife, is carried to the full extreme by the devil himself, a comically suspect source. The husband, profoundly distressed by the "fiend"-like contention he now suffers, offers up all of his worldly possessions (93-94)--for him a comically significant sacrifice which is in equal measure meaningless for the devil, a prince of this world--and begs for the cure to be removed. But the devil comically affects mock-terror at the suggestion:

"I dar not cum neirhand hir!
I am devill butt doutt--
First language learnit hir till--
I dar not be sa stoutt

To bið hir hald hir still.
 Fra scho delyte to fecht & flytt
 I dar not with hir mell!"
 (96-102)

He inverts our expected beliefs about the relative power of human beings as against that of spiritual creatures, suggesting that a shrewish woman will out-fiend all the devils in Hell.¹¹⁴ It is no trick at all, he explains, to give a woman speech, but impossible even for the combined powers of Hell to silence her:

"The leist deuill yat is in hell
 Can gif ane wyff hir toung;
 The gritest, I 3ow tell,
 Cannot do mak hir dum.
 Fra scho begin to clatter
 Scho will claver quhat scho pleis:
 We devillis can nawayis latt hir."
 (105-111)

He asserts that even Hell's legions cannot control (or, by inference, tolerate) an ill-tempered woman; that shrews, ironically, command a greater devilry. The cure--and the husband's marital situation--is irreversible. With the damage done, the cynical devil's final piece of advice is for the husband to reconcile himself to it: "For it is ill over all: / Latt thy wyff speik hir fill / Sen scho yairto was borne" (121-23). He counsels a graceful surrender in the battle for marital supremacy. His sardonic, universal "fact" of nature--"yairto was borne"--holds no other hope for him.

The husband's domestic fate, though painful, is comically self-inflicted; and it is not a serious enough catastrophe to warrant our

114. The idea that a shrewish wife is uncontrollable by and worse than Hell itself is a common folk motif. Cf. for example "The Farmer's Curst Wife" (Child No. 278) in Francis J. Child, English and Scottish Popular Ballads, 5 vols., (Boston & New York: 1882; rpt. 1965), V, 107-108. A variant of the idea that some groups of people are more noxious than Hell occurs in Dunbar's Fasternis Evin in Hell. Dunbar casts "Ersch"-speaking Highlanders in this odious role, satirizing them: see Dunbar, 150-57, lines 109-120.

sympathetic concern. It arises from choices governed by his character, which manifests itself in incongruous behaviour mixing realism, idealism, and profound ignorance, manic-depressive excesses in emotion, and a narrow allegiance to false, worldly values. He takes a wife for solid medieval reasons, "for hir riches and hir rentes" (25), considerations of property; and he regards her as "geir" (8, 23), goods or chattel. Yet he "repentes" (27) of it--like "bliss" later, an ironic choice of phrase given the context--due to a curiously idealistic vision of marriage: "wthair wyfes war glaid / To mak yar husbandis blyth" (1-2), while his own wife "sat and nothing said, / And comfort none could kyth" (3-4). As well as material gains, he expects her to supply him with entertainment and "comfort"; and in this respect he seems to view her as he would a favourite pet. His disappointment contrasts incongruously with his hard reasons for wedding, but fits in with his worldly attachment, his dependence on temporal objects for happiness. We see what a thorough reversal has come over him when he offers all his possessions to the devil in exchange for relief. His folly is two-fold, for he exhibits no understanding of either domestic or divine realities.

Because his whole happiness, his "eirdlie Ioy," rests on a "comfortable" marriage, he accepts the devil's offer of remedy with unthinking speed. Just as his sorrow at her "irksome" (28) silence is ridiculously excessive, so is his over-eagerness to try out the cure. Where before he was desperate, he now experiences "bliss" (47) at the prospect of change. He waits impatiently for nightfall ("Thocht lang [till] it was ewin," 48); and when at last she falls asleep he applies an overdose of the prescription: "he laid in leifis thrie, / Think and his cuir to wirk most suir" (52-53). He compounds ignorance with

zeal, comically assuming that if one leaf is good then three will be better. His behaviour, in accord with his emotional fluctuations, is comically excessive. He fails to heed the devil, who had foretold that one leaf would beget success exceeding his expectations. Considering the questionable source of the remedy, and the fiend's accurate caveat (humorous foreshadowing lost on the unenlightened husband), the husband's behaviour is foolhardy in the extreme.

"Eirdlie Ioy," to the exclusion of higher compulsions and the achievement of heavenly "bliss," is the foolish husband's sole concern. That is, he is guided by comically self-defeating cupiditas; and true love, caritas, does not enter his consideration. We find God's name on his tongue but once, and then it unwittingly forms an emphatic epithet: "God knawis ye drerie Lyff / I had sen scho was dum; / Off ane gud quyet wyff / Is now ane feind becum" (73-76). The irony of his contrasting, empty uses of "God" and "feind" is lost on him.

The Dumb Wife exposes serious shortcomings in the husbandman's character and outlook, and there is no question but that he earns his earthly perdition. His fate is poetically just; but it is a fate which, paradoxically, he does not find impossible to bear. The educational experience proves valuable, and he passes from ignorance to a belated wisdom. As a first step toward recovery he learns to accept that he is most responsible for his own downfall: "Blame thyself," the devil says, "That gaif hir superflew" (82-83), and he silently agrees. He also accepts the fiend's sardonic final counsel. He makes the best of his self-created situation, no longer plagued by hopeless expectations. This contentment is precisely what he could not achieve previously when his marital situation was comparatively better. He "per-

ceives" that no one "hes as I wald haif: / His wyff at his command" (133-36). His perception may be comically wrong in fact, for it is predicated on the devil's view of women; but that aspect is finally immaterial. What is significant, and rather touchingly expressed, is his realization that he was at fault for asking the impossible. He therefore becomes patient and tolerant, learning to live with his wife as she is. He suffers no further emotional excesses, but achieves a balance. He takes no further offence, and turns ill-tempered words to sport (137-40), thereby earning a measure of peace in his household and within himself. By finishing as it does with new knowledge for the protagonist and reconciliation for the couple, the poem elevates from the merely comic to being a humane comedy, complete with a traditional "happy ending" ("Quhill death yair dayis endit," 138-40).

The husband, and only incidentally his wife, is satirized. Contained in the satire are elements parodic of Genesis, as the tale broadly burlesques the Garden of Eden story. Of course, compared to Adam there is no excuse for the husband's "innocence" (i.e. his homely folly and worldly aspirations). But, following satanic counsel, he destroys a potential paradise (though in theological terms a fool's paradise), and comes to know good by tasting evil. The devil functions both as the Tempter and, in a limited, Jobian sense, as an agent for God, putting him back on the path toward wisdom. He presents the means whereby to fall--and, significantly, "language" is the devil's tool (his remark "First language learnit hir till" specifically recalls Adam and Eve). He offers patience as the solution, a sound spiritual answer to earthly trials. Ironically, it is the husband in this story, and not the wife, who in his folly is tempted and falls; and he can blame no one. Unlike Genesis, the tale's consequences are personal

and not universal, despite the fiend's contrary "universal" assertions regarding marriage; and the stakes--suffering temporal rather than near-eternal purgatory--are comically reduced in scale. On a moral plane the poem wryly questions the nature and function of marriage, rejecting the husband's values, his notion of "eirdlie Ioy." Yet we do not feel that the husband is finally damned (spoiling the humour), even in this life. He learns a hard lesson, and gains wisdom enough to accept Creation--including his limitations--as it exists, a significant change of personality pointing toward moral regeneration. He alters his attitude and his behaviour, accepting with a certain grace his new lifestyle. The conclusion of the comedy is sardonic yet hopeful, forestalling a need for a moral tag¹¹⁵ by supplying a tacitly didactic message in its harmonious conclusion.

If we may define sin broadly as error, all three fabliaux are humorously concerned with the recognition and correction of sin. In each, a topsy-turvy vision of the domestic world is presented, and then rejected. The upsidedown nature of sin chiefly manifests itself in role-reversals which are righted in the course of events: Abbot Johine becomes a servile fiend, is punished and returned to his proper place; at the same time, Alesone's extra-marital lusts are checked. The wife and husbandman of Auchtirmwchty trade jobs, then gladly reclaim their former positions. And even the dumb wife's ironic reversal, from pensive silence to vexing disquiet, restores the "natural"--and balanced--marital relationship. The didactic satire is that of the anti-feminist

115. Cf. Oesterley, op. cit., 109: "By this tale ye may note that a man oftymes desyreth and coueteth to moche that thyng that oft torneth to his dysplesure." The "moral" emphasis of The Dumb Wife is completely altered from such sentiments.

tradition; yet here, the men are more blameworthy than the women, whose perversity and cunning tricks are comically "given." The men are more ridiculous: foolish, weak, inept, prone to errors of belief and act. The women are less in need of education than their men, and do not change in any fundamental way; they dominate when confronted with weak and ignorant mates, filling the vacuum of power. Instead, it is the men who are brought to wisdom, to recognition of the nature of the world and of their own limitations; only Symon's naive "innocence" is necessarily preserved. Marriage, in Pauline terms, is a compromised state, by definition imperfect; yet marriage is far superior to the unchaste alternatives, protecting the interests of the individuals involved and those of society. Their messages are socially conservative. In these three fabliaux comically troubled marriages are repaired and strengthened; and discord gives place to harmony, a kind of quiet joy. The world is fallen, but it has an orderly arrangement which can and ought to be preserved.

Chapter Four

ROMANCE AND LEGEND

The two dominant forms of verse narrative in the Middle Ages throughout Europe were the romance and the saint's legend, both essentially mythic genres. The former related adventuresome tales of secular heroes; and the latter, perhaps more democratic in disregarding class barriers, related wonderful and awe-inspiring stories of spiritual heroes. The two kinds of narrative were complementary and contrapuntal. Both genres were primary sources for, and celebrations of, the chivalric and religious ideals of the age; and both forms of exemplary entertainment were long-lived and widely popular.

As with most "serious" genres, both kinds of adventure story inspired humorous counterparts--although this is more true of romance than saint's legend.¹ But it is a matter of considerable chance that humorous examples of both a romance and a "saint's legend" have survived in the Middle Scots tradition: The Taill of Rauf Coilyear (c. 1470),² a popular tale referred to by Gavin Douglas and William Dun-

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1. Take, for example, tales such as Chaucer's Sir Thopas or the anonymous French tale of Barnaby and Our Lady, the foolish friar who pleases the Blessed Virgin with his one talent, tumbling. Many fabliaux parody chivalrous love-adventures (and for that matter churchmen's religious obligations), as Chaucer's Miller's Tale devalues the preceding Knight's Tale. Certain saint's legends, especially involving fiends as in the stories of St. Margaret or St. Juliana, take delight in the comic manhandling of devils tempting God's true servants: see Seinte Marharete, ed. F.M. Mack, EETS O.S. 193, (London & Oxford: 1934), 40; and The Liflade of St. Juliana, ed. O. Cockayne and E. Brock, EETS O.S. 51, (London: 1872), 47, 65.
 2. I refer to the edition of the poem in Scottish Alliterative Poems, ed. F.J. Amours, STS 1st Ser. 27, 38, (Edinburgh & London: 1892-97), xxxiv-xl and 82-114. I also make use of The Taill of Rauf Coilyear, ed. Sidney J.H. Herrtage, EETS E.S. 39, (Oxford: 1882); and the facsimile of The Taill of Rauf Coilyear, ed. William Beattie, (Edinburgh: 1966).

bar;³ and The Legend of the Bischof of St. Androis Lyfe (1584) by Robert Sempill,⁴ a Reformation satirist distant from but obviously familiar with the saint's life tradition. I should clarify at the outset that by including these poems I am stretching the definition of "humorous" narrative verse in small measure, for these are fundamentally earnest poems which make sustained use of humorous elements.

Rauf Coilyear and The Bischof of St. Androis Lyfe are unique not only in their survival. Rauf Coilyear is the only known Scottish Charlemagne romance;⁵ it makes use of the folk-motif "chance encounters with the (disguised) king," popular among English and Continental ballad-makers;⁶ and it has no known French source, with the possible ex-

3. Herrtage, op. cit., v. Douglas's Palice of Honour appeared in 1501, and Dunbar's petition in verse "To the King" is thought to have been written around 1500: see The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt, STS 4th Ser. 3, (Edinburgh & London: 1960), p. 109, l. 1711; and Dunbar, p. 124, l. 33.
4. In Satirical Poems of the Time of the Reformation, ed. James Cranstoun, 2 vols., STS 1st Ser. 20, 24, 28, 30, (Edinburgh & London: 1889-93), I, 346-90. Cranstoun (II, 226-35) provides a brief, balanced biography of Patrick Adamson. See also David Calderwood, The History of the Kirk of Scotland, 8 vols., (Edinburgh: 1842-49), II, III, IV, and V, *passim*; William Scot, An Apologetical Narration of the State and Government of the Kirk of Scotland, (Edinburgh: 1858), 25, 40, 50-59; and William K. Boyd, ed. The Calendar of the Scottish State Papers Relating to Scotland, 13 vols., (Edinburgh: 1910), IV (1581-82), 651-52, 655, 667-68. Sempill's 1253-line verse chronicle is addressed to the "Edinburgh ballies" (Preface, 119-20), but apparently they did not see fit to licence the printing of his parodic invective, and so the poem survives in two manuscript copies only, lodged in the National Library of Scotland and the Drummond Collection of the Edinburgh University Library (see Cranstoun, I, 346).
5. Moreover, it ranks as the finest to have been produced in Britain: H.M. Smyser, "Charlemagne Legends" in A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, ed. J. Burke Severs, 5 vols., (New Haven, Connecticut: 1967), I, 80, notes that "English Charlemagne romances are in the main undistinguished to say the least. The best of the lot, the ebullient Taill of Rauf Coilyear, is only nominally a Charlemagne romance."
6. Herrtage, op. cit., v-vi. Cf. also F.J. Child, English and Scottish Popular Ballads, 5 vols., (Boston & New York: 1882; rpt. 1965),

ception of the proverb "charbonnier est maitre chez soi," but in fact with its barren landscapes and wintry desolation seems completely Scottish apart from its references to Paris and the proper names of Charlemagne and his confederates.⁷ Rauf Coilyear is comic but not irreverent toward its subject, unlike, for example, Chaucer's parodic Sir Thopas; and in its use of the 13-line rhymed, alliterative stanzas (an octave with 5-line enclosed "wheel") it falls midway between the serious romances Golagros and Gawane and Awntyrs of Arthure, and Kynd Kittok or Henryson's "Sum Practise of Medicine," all of which employ the same stanzaic form. That is, in Rauf Coilyear we see beginning in Scots the use of a "serious" verse-form common to the Alliterative Revival in a humorous context.⁸

Sempill's savagely mocking "legend of a lymmaris life" (3) is unique in both the Middle Scots and English traditions.⁹ Sempill satir-

V, 69-71, who summarizes the story of John the Reeve (c. 1460), an English analogue closely linked with Rauf Coilyear.

7. Amours, op. cit., xxxix. Janet Smith, The French Background of Middle Scots Literature, (Edinburgh & London: 1934), 21, thinks there may be a link between Rauf Coilyear and a Belgian story concerning Charles V and a broom-maker, implying a common French original now lost.
8. Thorlac Turville-Petre, The Alliterative Revival, (Cambridge, England: 1977), 117, says of Rauf Coilyear that "although stock themes of romance are present, they are, for the first time in alliterative poetry, treated lightheartedly." I believe the poem, however comic, is more in the mainstream of romance literature than Dr. Turville-Petre suggests.
9. Sempill states that he is in Newcastle (Preface, 135). Adding another odious episode to Adamson's Lyfe, apparently as an afterthought, Sempill reports "ane vther trick...The threttene day of this November" (1074-75). Since Adamson returned from his embassy to London in May 1584, it is to be assumed that Sempill was writing the poem late in the same year or early in the next, after the date of this last-cited folly. Zealous Presbyterian ministers, following Andrew Melville, had been forced to flee to England in order to escape James VI's angry "Black Acts" in May 1584. Adamson, an apologist for James VI, was called on by his sovereign to preach in Edinburgh in the summer of that year; but his attempt to fill the gap left by the exiled ministers did not prove a success. A

izes a fellow-Protestant, Adamson, an ostensibly "reformed" kirkman and lawyer whose episcopal aims and dissolute lifestyle seemed to Sempill to represent the discreditable way of life associated with the old religion. His edifying purpose is to warn, to "ken the lupus in the lamb skyn" (Preface, 6). His method is singularly effective: by casting Adamson's misdeeds in the form of the Scottish saint's legends, octosyllabic couplets,¹⁰ Sempill formally associates Adamson's history with despised papistry. Thereafter, though heavily biased, Sempill reports with apparent fidelity selected episodes from the Archbishop's career. The misdeeds as presented by Sempill carry the burden of the satire.

Rauf Coilyear, with its comic episodes and ironic tone, has been described as a "burlesque romance";¹¹ yet it is a tale in concert with

decree was published on 26 September 1584 prohibiting the insults and abuse aimed at Adamson as he walked the streets of Edinburgh by the children, wives, and servants "of such papists, libertines, atheists; and suchlike treasonable persons" then in exile for their anti-episcopal stand. The penalty was death to the man whose family disobeyed: see The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, ed. David Masson, 15 vols., (Edinburgh: 1880), III (1578-85), 690-91. Gordon Donaldson, Scotland: James V - James VII, (Edinburgh: 1971), 179-82, points out that the ministers, and fugitive lords in opposition to Arran's reactionary Chancellorship, were congregated in Newcastle. It seems likely that Sempill, a hard-line Knoxian, was forced to flee to Newcastle with the other Presbyterian refugees. The grudge-match poem, then, assumes a high degree of topicality.

10. See The Legends of the Saints, ed. W.M. Metcalfe, 3 vols., STS 1st Ser. 13, 18, 23, 25, 35, 36, (Edinburgh & London: 1887-96). Octosyllabic couplets are used consistently throughout.
11. Cf. T.F. Henderson, Scottish Vernacular Literature, 3rd ed., (Edinburgh: 1910), 78; Maurice Lindsay, History of Scottish Literature, (London: 1977), 24; and H.M. Smyser, "The Taill of Rauf Coilyear and Its Sources," Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature, 14 (1932), 149. (Further citations of Smyser will refer to this article.) Burlesque in the sense of grotesque imitation, derisive caricature, mockery, travesty, or parody (OED) is neither accurate nor adequate as a description of the work. A more limited--though still, I think, inaccurate--use of this description is applied by Flora Alexander, "Burlesque in The Taill of Rauf Coilyear," an unpublished paper delivered at the first Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Scottish Language and Literature held at

the romance tradition and so not a satire. The Bishop of St. Androis Lyfe, in contrast, is wholly, ridiculously satiric. But it is topical satire, aimed at one individual instead of at a group, an idea, or an institution. It does not satirize saint's legends or papishness per se. Both poems, especially the latter, remain almost completely ignored, and unjustly so, for the Rauf Coilyear-poet and Robert Sempill make interesting, highly individual uses of their forms and materials.

i. A Masque of Caritas

Rauf Coilyear neither satirizes traditional romance themes nor parodies traditional romance forms,¹² and therefore may not be classified as a burlesque. The tone of its conclusion is as sober as the tone of its beginning stanzas, although its mood progresses from seriousness to happiness. The poem is concerned with joy, not ridicule. Provoking laughter is not the primary consideration in Rauf Coilyear. To be sure, the poem contains humorous components, the broadest of which are confined to the first third of the tale. But its comic ele-

the University of Glasgow in 1975. Hers is a useful study, and Dr. Alexander has very kindly supplied me with a copy of the twenty page typescript. She feels that the poem makes a limited use of burlesque elements as part of the comic strategy, but that burlesque is not "the principle intention of the poem" (p. 2).

12. Alexander, *ibid.*, 7-14, argues that the poem "burlesques" the traditional world-view of romances by concentrating on workaday economic realities, by revealing the world through Rauf's limited perceptions (psychological realism), and by avoiding any supernatural or miraculous machinery. Further, a burlesque effect is enhanced by Rauf's "mannerless" treatment of Charles "in defiance of courtly custom" and Rauf's initial failure to live up to chivalric expectations, i.e. mistaking Magog for Roland. But "burlesque," even in these restrained terms, is not an appropriate description. I would suggest that pervasive realism does not necessarily precipitate a comic clash of world-views; and that Rauf's errors arising from ignorance, while ironic and humorous, do not so much burlesque chivalric ideals as invite a comparison between the expectations of "courtesy" and Rauf's version of it.

ments are supportive of the whole structure, essential yet subordinate to the serious chivalric themes explored within the larger framework of the poem.

At first glance, the poem seems to be a comedy of manners: a rude labourer roughly insists on sovereignty in his own home, unwittingly and illegally abusing his guest the king, who, despite all treasons, enjoys himself and is grateful enough later to forgive and reward his host. This superficial estimate would constitute an adequate description of the analogous John the Reeve, a poem akin to the fabliau tradition in tone and intention. Yet Rauf Coilyear's comedy of manners develops at length into a comedy of matter, a positive demonstration of Christian charity, an ideal present in the characters' beliefs and behaviour. Ideas of knightly conduct and character are finally treated as themes of high seriousness. "Courtasie," or lack of it, governs a man's social dealings and determines his spiritual worth. It is a complicated, almost indefinable, notion that embodies ideals of conduct redounding to one's credit: Christian virtues (piety, humility, obedience, charity); civil graces (courtly manners, skill at music or story-telling, pursuit of idealized love, deferential self-sacrifice, honouring social and intellectual superiors, protection of the weak); and personal honour (physical prowess, intellectual excellence, courage, loyalty, self-esteem, oath-keeping at all costs, and the lawful pursuit of glory). The poem moves steadily through temporal humour into serious divine "comedy" in the Christian sense of the term, from laughter, that is, to joy, redemption physical (Rauf's commuted hanging) and spiritual (the final salvation of Magog the Saracen), ending with a vision of earthly peace and social harmony. In my view, the poem becomes a kind of Christmas pageant, and reflects a romance trad-

ition wider than hitherto suspected.

Rauf Coilyear resolves happily, with a significant Christian conclusion. But until Charlemagne's "unmasking" at Christmas court the poem enacts a multivalent structure of irony which arises from Rauf's ignorance of his guest's identity (Charlemagne masquerades as someone he is not). Rauf exists complete outwith the world of the court, and is even ignorant of its whereabouts (246). Literally on the fringe of society, Rauf is an "outlaw,"¹³ an occasional deer-poacher, contemptuous of the king's "Forestaris" (195-201), the nearest representatives of royal authority. He knows Charlemagne only by reputation, as the "Cheif King of Cheualry" (295); thus, while incongruous, it is not surprising that he fails to recognize his sovereign. His follies, his short-tempered indiscretions, are potentially disastrous; and the comedy of his situation is enhanced in that his errors are potentially avoidable--he could have asked courteously, as Charlemagne does, the stranger's "richt name" (45) at the outset of their encounter.

To dismiss the comic techniques of Rauf Coilyear as "broad and less sophisticated" than those of the Howlat is to read the tale with little sympathy.¹⁴ The humour of the poem, which on first examination appears to be merely of a low-grade farcical variety, is highly complex. The episodes of farce subtly contain elements of profound thematic seriousness; and the poem's multifaceted comic structure includes inter-

13. John and Winifred MacQueen, eds. A Choice of Scottish Verse, 1450-1570, (London: 1972), 196, suggest that despite the French setting Rauf is intended to represent a border reiver and that the forest he inhabits is Ettrick Forest, near Edinburgh.

14. J.H. Millar, A Literary History of Scotland, (London: 1903), 41: "The humour is of a broad and less sophisticated type [than that of the author of the Howlat]--savouring almost in passages of the 'knockabout' comedian--and he gives, upon the whole, the impression of having been a man of inferior accomplishment to his rival of the Howlat."

playing situational and verbal ironies.

Mistaken identity is the central premise around which the physical and verbal comedy revolves. Rauf does not know or trouble himself to find out that he plays host to his king: this sets the stage for his curt insults and slapstick abuses of Charles, inadvertent follies born of a misunderstanding and so more ludicrous than ridiculous. Charles contributes to the ironic mistake by concealing, then later falsifying, his true identity.

In Rauf's rough attempts to teach a lesson in country etiquette there are three occasions on which he unwittingly, and so ironically, commits treason: his errors, each more audacious than the last, build up a comic crescendo. Twice Charles wilfully follows the dictates of fashion and so runs athwart Rauf's wishes. Losing his temper, Rauf lays hands on his king, and reproves him for being mentally slow and mannerless:

The Coil3ear, gudlie in feir, tuke [Charles] be the hand
And put him befoir him, as ressoun had bene;
Quhen thay come to the dure, the King begouth to stand,
To put the Coil3eir in befoir, maid him to mene.
He said, "Thow art vncourtes, that sall I warrand."
He tyt the King be the nek, twa part in tene;
"Gif thow at bidding suld be boun or obeysand,
And gif thow of Courtasie couth, thow hes for3et it clene.
Now is anis," said the Coil3ear, "kynd aucht to creip,
Sen ellis thow art vnknawin
To mak me Lord of my awin;
Sa mot I thrive, I am thrawin,
Begin we to threip!"

(118-130)

Worse, when crossed a second time Rauf batters Charlemagne as he might a dull neighbour, knocking him to the floor and reiterating his previous reproachful insults: "Schir, thow art vnskilfull" (146-59).

Rauf again clarifies his reason, "Thocht I simple be, / Do as I byd
the: / The hous is myne, pardie" (164-66). Charlemagne, of course, is
"stonischit at this straik" (173), but prudently checks his temper;

and his impotence seems comically to point up his helpless dependence on Rauf, a reversal of their traditional social roles. Each time Rauf erringly "corrects," and especially manhandles, Charlemagne without being aware of his guest's identity he puts his life in jeopardy with ironic carelessness: Rauf's behaviour is not merely farcical, it carries the added piquancy of being comically self-destructive.

Rauf's devil-may-care admission of breaking the king's statutes by deer-poaching is even more foolish. Though he does not know his guest's identity he recognizes his nobility and probable connection with the court (comically confirmed by "Wymond of the Wardrop"). Yet Rauf, forgetting that his misdeeds might be reported at court, boasts of his crimes to the very person who should never know,¹⁵ capping his insults with scorn for the king's ineffectual foresters:

"They haue me all at Inuy for dreid of the Deir:
They threip that I thring doun of the fattest;
They say I sall to Paris, thair to compeir
Befoir our cumlie King, in dule to be drest.
Sic manassing thay me mak, forsuith, ilk 3eir,
And 3it aneuch sall I haue for me and ane Gest."

(198-203)

Rauf's incautious revelation, concluding on a note of ironically understated self-satisfaction, comically foreshadows his initially doleful appearance before the king at Paris. But again, while bragging of crimes, at the same time he selflessly offers to share the illicit provender with an open hand. Our response to his action is one of horror-cum-comic delight. We experience the laughter of a release

15. This forms part of Gyliane's warning to Rauf to rue his indiscretions and eschew the court: "Thow gaif him ane outrageous blaw, and greit boist blew" (369). Her fears ironically prove incorrect. Gyliane in no way resembles a fabliau heroine. She is not wilful, selfish, and abusive but obedient, agreeable in company, and shrewd in perceiving Rauf's faults and advising him to tread warily, concerned for his welfare. She is a genuine helpmate, a "hende" lady (967) worthy to be wife of the new-made Marshall of France.

from restraint in addition to incongruous laughter: we enjoy a gratification of humanity's suppressed desires to see figures of authority and dignity helplessly reduced to near-buffoonery without penalty.

The irony of the situation is complex in that Rauf inadvertently commits treason in the very act of saving the king's life. Rauf accuses Charlemagne of discourtesy, and the irony of this is likewise complicated in that he is both right and wrong. Charlemagne is the king that "maist couth of courtasie in this Cristin eird" (171), and on one level Rauf's assessment is plainly absurd. Yet Rauf's code of conduct is based on logic, "ressoun" ("as ressoun had bene"); and in terms of the host-guest relationship Rauf's "chez moi" judgment is ironically accurate, just as his earlier proverbs had been (79-80, 86-87). The king's authority, of course, supersedes all ordinary rules. But the king poses as Wymond the guest. "At bidding" a guest is obliged to be "boun or obeysand," to make Rauf "Lord of [his] awin." The head of the household, like the head of state, rules absolutely in his own domain. When Charles balked a second time at fulfilling Rauf's request he earned Rauf's corrective cuffs ("Now is twyse...me think thow hes for3et," 148). The lesson--and it is intended as an educational process--is not lost on Charlemagne, who complains "This is an euill lyfe, / 3it was I neuer in my life thus-gait leird" (168-69). The supper following is peaceful; and it is evident that the king has "leird" Rauf's ways, for Rauf proposes a drink "for my bennysoun" and, again citing "ressoun," asks their guest to begin (214-15). On this third occasion the king satisfies Rauf's entreaty, and finds that contentious words and rough treatment are replaced by blessings and thanks. Comic conflict evaporates.

Rauf, in short, demands that his wishes be respected, unaware of

his guest's ways or ultimate authority; and in this expectation a further situational irony reveals itself. Rauf abuses Charlemagne in the name of his own common sense, but Rauf's wishes simply amount to a desire to give his guest precedence. Rauf is charitable at large:

"Thow suld be wel-cum to pass hame with me, / Or ony gude fallow that I heir fand" (71-72). But he also recognizes the stranger's nobility--

"to serue sic ane man as me think the" (67), "Thow byrd to haue nur-
tour aneuch," "Thow suld be courtes of kynd" (159-60; my italics)--and attempts to treat him accordingly. Their conflict essentially concerns who owes the other deference, who should take pride of place, the honour of leading the company. Courteous Charlemagne, ignoring his rank, steps aside in order for his host to go first ("That war vnsemand... and thy self vnset," 146). But Rauf's rank-conscious "ressoun" demands that he politely defer to his guest. Without knowing Charlemagne's identity, Rauf ironically wishes to treat him as befits a king, hospitably according Charles the honoured place in his home, demanding that a "Ryall rufe het fyre" be kindled for his comfort (109; my italics), and seeing to his wants by feasting and entertaining him. Further, though Rauf insultingly instructs his guest, he compliments his Charlemagne his king, likewise unwittingly and so ironically. He describes him as "our cumlie King"; and when "Wymond" departs next morning Rauf refuses--with heavy irony, given his previous accusations--to take payment for his charitable services: "And thow of Charlis cumpany, / Cheif King of Cheualry, / That for ane nichtis harbery / Pay suld be laid" (296-99; my italics). Rauf is inadvertently foolish but deliberately charitable during the course of the king's stay. As "Wymond," Charlemagne can accept Rauf's declarations--good and bad--as unfeigned and honest.

The characters' verbal incongruities are both accidental, such as Rauf's several mistaken home truths, and deliberate. Charles, in the person of "Wymond," is a good-natured wit-figure, responsible for or associated with the poem's verbal play. His ironic sense of humour is appropriately urbane and courtly. He tells self-deprecating, hidden truths for his own amusement, as when he thanks Rauf for the high-quality but ill-gotten feast: "The King him self hes bene fane / Sum tyme of sic fare" (205-206). This instance of litotes is one of the few in the poem without a grim cutting edge of seriousness: compare, for example, "In wickit wedderis...it drew to the nicht: / The King lykit ill" (36-39); "He faind neuer of ane fall / Quhill he the eird fand" (153-54); or Rauf's arguing at court "with the Ischar ofter than anis" (644). Charlemagne later makes feeling use of ironic understatement in admitting that the future Sir Rauf "semis...stout in stryking" (745).

Dubbing himself "Wymond of the Wardrop," Charlemagne exhibits gentle self-mockery in describing his position at court as an important gentleman of the Queen's bedchamber:

"Ane Chyld of hir Chalmer, Schir, be Sanct Jame
And thocht my self it say, maist inwart of ane;
For my dwelling to night, I dreid me for blame."
(237-39)

His humorous assertion is in fact correct, but offers as well a subtle double entendre which of course passes by Rauf. It is possible to interpret "the Queen's chamber" in the same lewdly punning sense as the term is used in the English ballad "My Gentle Cock."¹⁶ This seems to

16. In R.H. Robbins, ed. Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries, 2nd ed., (Oxford: 1955), 41-42:

"his eynyn arn of cristal,
lokyn al in aumbyr;

be the only deliberate pun in the poem. And Charles comically "dreads blame" for this night's absence not, as Rauf would take it, because his palace function is so important he will be missed, although this is true and the Queen will undoubtedly worry; but because the Queen may interpret his absence as a sign of extra-marital philandering.

Charles also slyly mimics his host. "Ressoun," Rauf's watchword, becomes a comic leitmotif, recurring in ironically conflicting contexts, comically contrasting his logical, superficially correct beliefs with his testy behaviour. Charlemagne, tempting Rauf to mercantile rewards at Paris, employs this elemental phrase in appealing to him to make the journey: "Thair may thow sell, be ressoun, als deir als thow will prys" (252; my italics). Echoing him, and himself, Rauf agrees: "Me think it ressoun, be the Rude, that I do thy rid" (259). He is able to accept, as well as give, logical advice. In setting off for court, he again relies ironically on logic in quashing Gyliane's well-founded misgivings: "I spak not out of ressoun...To Wymond of the Wardrop war the suith knawin" W378-79). Reason is on the side of Gyliane's "counsell," however. Their exchange comically pulls in two directions, for both are correct and mistaken in their beliefs. Gyliane's intuition about Rauf's grave offences and "Wymond's" true rank is accurate, and her fears warranted (366-75); but she is mistaken regarding their guest's motives (Charlemagne's charity, unexpected and in some ways undeserved, does not logically follow). Rauf's self-righteous rejoinder is in fact wrong; but his confident faith in their guest's honour proves to be correct. Logic is humorously perverted:

& euery ny3t he perchit hym
in myn ladyis chaumbyr."

Cf. also "In My Lady's Chamber," *ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

paradoxically, Gyliane is wrong for the right reasons, Rauf right for the wrong reasons.

The wilderness encounter between the peasant Rauf and Charlemagne, with its ironic clash of personalities and social codes, is highly amusing but not merely entertaining. These initial comic scenes of Rauf's hospitality have at least two intermeshing thematic functions. The first is to prepare the reader for Rauf's reciprocal visit to Paris, establishing his motive for going and providing a basis of comparison for the parallels and contrasts between court and country hospitality. The second purpose is to reveal the true nature of the protagonists' characters, authenticating their subsequent acts as heartfelt, unaffected by pretence. They meet one another, that is, man to man, not vassal to lord.

It is essential therefore that Charlemagne's identity remain a mystery to Rauf. This circumstance functions as the mainspring of the plot, providing the basis of comic conflict (Rauf's unfeigned foolishness) and the subsequent action. At the same time it creates suspense, for Charlemagne's reasons in luring Rauf to court remain ambiguous.¹⁷ Comic ignorance supplies the necessary gauge of Rauf's liking and genuine respect for his guest. Without this "mysterious stranger" premise there would be no significant story. If Rauf had known Charlemagne's identity from the outset no doubt he would have behaved differently, taken care in speech and act, played a role for the king's benefit and so created a false impression. Anything said or done by Rauf would

17. As Gyliane dreads, revenge and not gratitude seems Wymond's probable motivation. Rauf trusts that his guest is, like him, as good as his word. But Charlemagne's obvious anxiety that Rauf should come as promised increases our suspicion of his intentions, maintaining our interest in the unfolding action.

have to be interpreted in that light: his charitable impulses could only be considered as self-serving, politic manoeuvres. As it is, Rauf's ignorant behaviour is in all respects honest, proceeding from his character and not from calculation. Because Charlemagne knows Rauf sincerely for what he is, the king's response is genuine in turn. He trades life for life, showing charity for charity. Charlemagne's considerable reward, then, is simultaneously appropriate and magnanimous.

The personalities they reveal are predicated upon Rauf's deficient understanding. They are admirable men despite any weaknesses. Rauf displays a mixture of traits: he is manly, independent, honest, gruff, shrewd, short-sighted, self-righteous, trusting, and generous. He also exhibits a rather bellicose taciturnity (e.g. "Na, thank me not our airlie, for dreid we threip," 79, comically foreshadowing their initial quarrel). But Rauf is not curt of speech or challenging of demeanour (56, 86-87) simply because he harbours a hostile suspicion of the stranger. His evident belligerence, as we discover later in his offended replies to Roland's "unreasonable" demands, stems from a pride that will brook no scorn (cf. 428-29). Rauf's self-esteem, his sense of courtesy, is strong. He refuses to endure mockery, and he quickly rises to insults to his honour, real or imagined.

Charlemagne, as Smyser points out, does not resemble at all the "sad and austere" Emperor of the early French gestes or the "peevish tyrant" of the later ones.¹⁸ He is characterized as "gentill" (204), wise, wry, patient, good-humoured, peace-loving, just, and remarkably democratic, virtually a perfect--and perfectly courteous--Christian

18. Smyser, op. cit., 138-39.

king. His portrait is at once endearing and highly idealized. He does not get angry, make threats, or abuse his power even when provoked, but turns the other cheek, remaining emotionally balanced and gracious. His dignity as "Wymond" is imperilled--his courteous greeting is met with some churlishness, he endures absurd mistreatment, he dresses himself next day comically "scant of Squyary" (273) and is forced to awaken Rauf and Gyliane in order to say good-bye.¹⁹ But his dignity as king is never truly diminished; indeed, it is partially restored in the scenes putting "Wymond" to bed after their feast. Charlemagne's dignity is enhanced especially in the elevated, splendid, and celebratory scenes of the king's return to Paris amid Christmas rejoicings (324-62), scenes which completely eradicate any remaining taint left by the previous evening's foolish misunderstandings.

Ironical motifs, such as "ressoun," recur throughout the tale in phrase or action; these set up comic reverberations that help to progress thematically to a higher moral plane and to knit the story together. "Courtesy" continues to be a significant concern, shifting upward from its limited domestic sense to broader questions of character and conduct. Rauf, as he has with Charlemagne, comes to accuse Roland of discourtesy: Rauf kneels "courtesly" to the strangely-behaving knight, who bids him to "leif his courtasie" and follow him without delay. Rauf declares "it is na courtasie commounis to scorne" (420-29). His is a notion of courtesy again based on fairness and common sense. Rauf continues stubbornly to correct, challenge, and offer physical violence to his social superiors, for motives of personal integrity.

19. Alexander, *op. cit.*, 11-12, remarks that these ironic reminders of missing ceremony serve to keep before the reader a contrast between custom and actual treatment. She rightly notes that Charlemagne is never mocked (p. 5).

Once Rauf struggles his way through the courtiers to confront Charlemagne it dawns on him, with comic horror, that he was "begylit" (710). Illusion gives way to knowledge: the comic "unmasking" of Charlemagne, instantly overturning Rauf's ignorance, leads to the humour of Rauf squirming under dread of execution. He now fervently wishes he knew "the Kingis Courtasie" even if it meant consulting the Devil (719), comic hyperbole. And yet Charlemagne--ironically overthrowing his knights' judgment that Rauf should hang, Rauf's own expectation--declares the triumph of Rauf's reason-governed personal code: "That Carll for his courtasie salbe maid Knicht!" (746; my italics). I shall explore the nature of Rauf's courtesy below, as there is some question of his desserts. The remainder of the tale--Rauf's fight with the Saracen, prompted by his obligation to maintain his pledged word, and the Christian climax--develops Rauf's satisfactory achievement of true knightly courtesy.

Rauf's journey to court also offers ironic parallels to Charlemagne's forest sojourn. In town Rauf is quite as lost as Charlemagne was in the stormy wilderness. Roland, meeting him on the plain, urges in some haste "Thow suld compeir / To se quhat granting of grace the King wald the gaif" (497-98). Again the word "compeir" arises, echoing the threats of the king's foresters. Rauf, like Charles, stands on his own notions of propriety, and disobeys the obligation. As Charlemagne patiently endured abuse in Rauf's home, so Rauf "stalwartly" (699) suffers insults and blows at Charlemagne's court (631, 650-52, 696-98), comic "tit for tat" treatment that likewise culminates in the host's charity. And Rauf's initial failure to recognize Charlemagne is echoed by his comic failure to perceive that his "cruel" and redoubtable foe is a Saracen knight, as Roland knows at a glance. Still

the inexperienced outsider, Rauf only discovers this fact accidentally when he accuses Magog of bringing up reinforcements, ironically Roland himself (843-50). Ludicrous want of knowledge continues to betray Rauf into making ironic mistakes of identity. Incidentally, Rauf's oath--"an of vs sall neuer hine / Vndeid in this place" (854-55)--foreshadows Magog's conversion.

Rauf is base-born, a yeoman labourer guided by the workaday concerns of the merchant class, and possessed of a stubborn independence which leads him even to outlawry. He can be accused of choleric outbursts, pride, and short-sighted folly. Thus there arises the question of Rauf's worthiness to be elevated to a knighthood and a respected place at court. Charlemagne must be more than simply grateful for his rescue and pleased with his night's entertainment,²⁰ or a lesser reward would suffice. He must perceive in Rauf those essential qualities, however raw they might appear, pertaining to a "courteous" knight: social graces, personal integrity, and Christian virtue.

Rauf, for all his flaws, is a diamond in the rough, though completely excluded from Parisian-style civilisation humbly reflecting

20. In John the Reeve, edited by David Laing, Select Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of Scotland, rev. W. Carew Hazlitt, 2 vols., (London: 1895), I, 250-83, King Edward "Longshanks" likewise promotes John to a knighthood, delighted with John's mischievous hospitality despite an accidental kick in the shins and John's confidential admission of tax evasion and other crimes. Yet John, in keeping with the demands of fabliau, remains throughout the tale a buffoonish figure--quick-witted in jesting, comically timorous, abused by his wife, foolishly inept in sheathing his rusty sword and battling with a porter at Windsor's gates. When rewarded, he is enriched but otherwise remains unchanged. He returns to being a waystop entertainer in an English backwater, and does no go on to deeds indicative of his new rank. But John the Reeve is designed solely to entertain. John does not move easily in the world of romance, and his knighthood therefore seems wholly gratuitous, a comic exaggeration.

the world of the court in microcosm. Ironically, that is, Rauf at home rudely mirrors Charles at court. He is absolute monarch in his "burlie biggin" (188). His notions of "courtasie" differ from Charlemagne's ideas; but his code of conduct is forthright and honourable, based on common sense and "ressoun." Supper is attended by appropriate ceremonies: they "wosch" before and after eating (143, 215), as the court does (726); the guest, escorting the lady of the house, leads the company to the table, where they are "marschellit" and "seruit" (181-84); and Rauf offers a cordial benediction (179-80). Their feast is hardly the "hamely fare" Rauf promises (112), but a truly lavish meal fit for a king, as Charles himself ironically suggests. No standard "feast" dish is wanting: they enjoy bread, roast boar, and the "worthiest wyne" in abundance, followed by "danteis" (185-89), poached deer (196), "Capounis and Cuningis," and birds baked in pies, all of which "thay had [in] plentie" and "fusion" (207-210). As they would at court, they repair to the fire, where "the Coil3ear tald / Mony sindrie taillis efter Suppair" (219-21; cf. 355). Finally, attended by his hosts, Charlemagne is led "to ane preuie Chalmer"--there may be some comic exaggeration here, as Rauf's "biggin" is probably no more than a but-and-ben dwelling--and put in a "burlie bed...Closit with Court-ingis, and cumlie cled" after being furnished more "of the worthiest wyne" (263-66). The emphasis, ironic in terms of a poor charcoal-maker, is on the sumptuousness, the due ceremony, the "worthiness" of Rauf's hospitality. Once Charles accepts his role as honoured and important guest, he could not have been better, or more decorously, treated if he had lodged with one of his noble subjects. Rauf, inadvertently treating his king like a king, exhibits essential social graces.

Charlemagne puts Rauf's character to the test by obtaining his promise to come to Paris. Rauf must prove his mettle by means of a quest. Charles knows that Rauf will have difficulty keeping his promise, that Rauf will be suspected of insanity in asking at court for a non-existent "Wymond" (indeed, Roland points out that he knows no one by that name, 527-32, and the courtiers believe Rauf to be "raifand," counting "not the Coilgear almaist at regaird," 650-52). To persist in his search requires physical stamina, courage, and an unshakable need to keep his oath, to fulfil his given word. He vows to Wymond "Traist weill I salbe thair" (308). His wife attempts to dissuade him from risking his life at court, but he replies "the weird is mine awin" (357) and "That I haue hecht I sall hald" (380). Roland is likewise unable to divert him from his promise to Wymond: "I sall hald that I haue hecht" (447), an idea he insists on repeatedly (489, 541, 798). No danger can move him to break his oath.

Rauf is a man of his word; and closely bound up with that trait is his loyalty. He insists he is a "lauchful man...that leifis with mekle lawtie" (508-509), a "trew" man (547; cf. 602, 846). He remains faithful to Charlemagne, as we have seen, and does not slander his prince but praises him. To Roland he insists on this loyalty, scorning riches and calling Christ to witness: "For na gold on this ground wald I, but weir, / Be fundin fals to the King, sa Christ me saue!" (499-500).

Rauf's oath-keeping and loyalty are aspects of his personal honour. He has a strong sense of personal worth--evident from his initial speeches--and refuses to accept anyone's contempt. I have already pointed out that he impugns Roland's courtesy for "scorning" him, a commoner. He is armed with "But ane auld Bucklair / And ane roustie

brand" (517-18), and it is a measure of the depth of his self-esteem that he challenges Roland for his insult and offers to fight to the death. As he is in earnest, his challenge is at once comically audacious and quixotically admirable. He is not argumentative merely for the sake of narrative humour, but takes offence out of a sense of honour rather than perverse contentiousness. He has a strength of character that makes him seem quite formidable, which Roland ironically acknowledges:

"It is lyke," said Schir Rolland, and lichtly he leuch,
 "That sic ane stubbill husband man wald stryke stoutly;
 Thair is mony toun man to tuggill is full teuch,
 Thocht thair brandis be blak and vnburely."

(519-22)

Roland, like Charlemagne, is a good-natured figure of restraint, patiently making peace rather than risking his reputation in an ignoble fight ("This is bot foly / To striue with him ocht mair," 553-54).²¹ His laugh, however, convinces Rauf that the knight offers him "ane foull scorne" (558) which he must redress; and so Rauf--the comic aggressor--presses Roland into accepting his challenge. Rauf is scorned, as he thinks, at least twice more, by the porter and by the courtiers who laugh at Charlemagne's recollection of Rauf's brazen misdeeds (635, 739). Rauf is honour-bound to keep his word and meet Roland in combat (again "to hald that I haue hecht," 780); and he makes it clear that his integrity is at stake: "Sall neuer Lord lauch on loft, quhill my

21. Alexander, op. cit., 5-6, points out that Roland "is reduced to an unaccustomed state of ineffectiveness," but "the joke is primarily about Rauf's intransigence, and...Roland's discomfiture is not given great emphasis." Rauf is intransigent on a matter of honour. But Roland has been given a baffling and unpleasant assignment, and so we can understand his eagerness to return to court and his subsequent anger at being thwarted, which results in his "discourteous" behaviour toward Rauf. Dr. Alexander also suggests that Roland's dignity is "restored" by the events concluding the poem.

lyfe may lest, / That I for liddernes suld leif" (784-85). Class-conscious, he is evidently deeply stung by the lords' mirthful contempt; and he strives to maintain his honour as a knight. He remains properly "stalwart," "stout," and "wicht" in combat with Magog, as he had in pushing through the hostile crowd of courtiers to find Wymond.

In addition to displaying basic social graces and personal honour, Rauf is a virtuous Christian despite his remoteness from society. We have seen that Rauf actively practises charity, that his angry outbursts are overshadowed by his generosity. He is also pious. His speeches never contain false or blasphemous oaths, but are punctuated by earnest Christian epithets such as "be my gude fay" (97), "be the Rude" (259, 550, 843), or "Be Christ that was Cristinnit, and his Mother deir" (495). Often these epithets, like this last cited, emphasize God's role as mankind's salvation: "Be him that me bocht" (180), "sa Christ me saue" (500), "Be the Mother and Maydin that maid vs remeid" (510), or "Now thankit be Drichtine" (853). His vows to God are of a kind noticed by Magog in regard to knights generally: "For I haue Cristin men sene, / That in mony angeris hes bene, / Full oft on [God] cry" (944-46). In this trait Rauf is especially like Roland when converting Magog (885, 890-94, 948). Charlemagne also follows Christ's precepts--albeit in earthly terms--by pardoning and rewarding a lowly sinner who is worthy of redemption. He lays a heavy stress on charity and broad Christian goals. His knights demand that Rauf "deserves" to hang for his crimes, but Charlemagne responds:

"God forbot...my thank war sic thing
 To him that succourit my lyfe in sa euill ane night!
 Him semis ane stalwart man and stout in stryking;
 That Carll for his courtasie salbe maid Knicht.
 I hald the counsall full euill that Cristin man slais,
 For I had myster to haue ma
 And not to distroy tha

That war worthie to ga
 To fecht on Goddis fais."
 (743-51)

In gratitude, Charlemagne reciprocates Rauf's acts of caritas, and lays emphasis on Christian unity; his speech and behaviour is appropriate to the Christmas season ("formest of the 3eir," 286). He ends his declaration by assuming his familiar role as chief of Christendom, calling for fellowship and marshalling forces for holy war against "Goddis fais." This foreshadows the divine "comedy" of the poem's conclusion, the hard-fought but bloodless conversion of Magog, the representative of Christianity's enemies. Charlemagne recognizes that Rauf, whatever his shortcomings, is "worthie" to be "maid Knicht"; and Rauf immediately becomes instrumental in upholding Charlemagne's wishes regarding the defence of Christendom. Rauf fights one of "God's foes" instead of the Christian Roland, thereby securing his knighthood and his acceptance in the community. It is a fortuitous blunder, to say the least.

I cannot agree that Rauf's fight with the Saracen is a "burlesque of chivalric combat" in keeping with the "farcical scene of the doorway entry,"²² no more than I could accept a similar claim of intentional self-parody for the exaggerated ankle-deep-in-blood battle between Palamon and Arcite over Emilye in Chaucer's Knight's Tale.²³ At

22. Turville-Petre, op. cit., 116. He goes on to say, missing both the tone and intentions of the poet: "In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 'cortaysye' is a Christian virtue of deep significance both to the poet and to his audience. In Rauf Coilyear it has become a question of who goes through the door first--an occasion for comedy. The poet is no longer committed to the idealized world of chivalry, and so cannot use it as a vehicle for serious moral and social comment; instead he views it from a distance and with an amused tolerance." My reading of the poem is completely antipathetic to this view, for the poem is used as a vehicle to convey "serious moral and social comment."

23. See Chaucer, Al635-1662 (esp. Al660).

this point the romance tradition has completely taken over from the earlier comedy of manners. Rauf's battle with the unknown adversary is straightforward and in deadly earnest (855-58). As Symser points out, claiming also that there is a certain air of "broad jocularitas" in the fight scene (e.g. the Saracen's camel is "ouir hie" for a charger, 810; Rauf still thinks he is battling Roland when he protests that his adversary has brought a supporter), its main features all have parallels in various Charlemagne and other romances: the dromedary "war-horse," the shattered lances and horses slain on impact, the ultimatum for Charlemagne carried by an infidel chieftain, the conversion of the heathen with Christian arguments plus an advantageous marriage.²⁴

Magog is not at all comic, yet essential to the fulfilment of the "comedy." The Saracen's portrait, his beliefs and behaviour, is very much a standard one from romance literature.²⁵ Magog is a strong and worthy knight, perfect in all chivalric matters but for his religious faith. He rides into battle on a "Cameill" rather than a "blonk" or "runsy," a normal charger (807). He calls on "Mahoun" and "Termagant," typical names of pagan deities, to give him strength (853). Magog at first rejects Roland's Mahoun-insulting claims for Christ and a call for his conversion, understandably seeking vengeance for Christian

24. Symser, op. cit., 147-49. He feels that the poet was "bent on imitating the stereotypical combat of the chanson de geste."

25. Cf. C. Meredith Jones, "The Conventional Saracen of the Songs of Geste," Speculum, 17 (1942), 201-255. In this seminal article, Jones writes: "religious fanaticism has almost always treated the Saracen...not merely as an infidel, but as a heathen devil about whom no invention is too far-fetched.... Put briefly, the French epic Saracen is a crude reversal of a French epic Christian. Everything a Christian holds to be perverse, wicked, detestable is presented as an integral part of Saracen doctrine, belief, or practice. He is offered as the natural enemy of Christendom." A change of faith, however, instantly erases all faults.

wrongs committed against his leaders and kinsmen (900-903). He brings warnings for Charles from "the Chan of Tartarie" of a Spring offensive (904-907). Roland, initially failing to convince Magog with Christian arguments, threats, and reminders of the heathen's unpleasant eternal reward in the netherworld, next offers two "Riche Douchereis" and a "gentill Duches" in marriage as a further inducement to convert: "Mair profite and mekle pardoun" (922-27). Such temporal bribery strikes modern ears as comic, but it was apparently quite normal to offer women--on both sides--as chattel rewards for religious treason.²⁶ Magog, properly unimpressed with material inducements (937), instead converts instantaneously and forever to Christianity because of the good things he has heard about the Christian God (940-49).²⁷ Magog's only real flaw is his religion; and, as is so often the case, when that is altered he becomes perfectly acceptable within the Christian community. As consistent as the battle scene, the description and conversion of the Saracen conforms thoroughly with conventions of the "serious" chanson de geste.

The conversion of Magog introduces a significant and traditional Christian motif. It bears a strong resemblance to elements of the Mummer's Plays performed annually at Christmas time.²⁸ These plays, usu-

26. Jones, *ibid.*, 220. See also Sencer Tonguç, "The Saracens in Middle English Charlemagne Romances," *Literature*, 5 (1958), 17-24.

27. Magog's abrupt conversion also seems to modern readers too unbelievably sudden; but, again, this was normal--even expected--in the romance tradition.

28. I am grateful to Professor John MacQueen for suggesting the comparison of Rauf Coilyear's conclusion with English Mummer's Plays. Smyser, *op. cit.*, 143, considers the Yule season to be "scarcely important" in the poem. In the edition of the poem in Laing's Select Remains, *op. cit.*, I, 214, Hazlitt thinks the "very skillfully introduced adventure with the Saracen may, perhaps, be considered as the strongest evidence of [the poem's] foreign origin." But it seems unnecessary to look so far afield for this episode's inspiration.

ally performed on Christmas day, frequently consist of combats between St. George (or some Christian hero) and a Turk (Saracen) or "Slasher" in which the Christian is victorious. The vanquished Saracen is miraculously restored to life by the victor or a doctor; and demons, fools, and dancers enter to jest, sing, and dance the play to a merry conclusion.²⁹ This "mock-death-and-resurrection" motif goes well back into medieval folk-belief (a remnant of pagan worship), appearing in Robin Hood plays, fabliaux, and romances, of which the "beheading game" in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight provides a well-known example.³⁰ Obviously this same theme is the substance of the climactic development in Rauf Coilyear; and the poet has with considerable skill welded this combat-conversion adventure to the bare outlines of the story as typified by John the Reeve. He has carefully set the scene at Christmas time, essential to both plot and theme (explaining the foul weather and dangerous circumstances besetting Charlemagne, and creating the atmosphere for reciprocal responses of charity); and Charlemagne's message of mutual love and unity--"I hald full euill that Cristin man slais" and "fecht on Goddis fais"--is enacted in the final episode. Christian battles Saracen, for the glory of their respective faiths; the Saracen "dies" (in this case he is not physically slain, but transformed verbally out of his present avatar); and the Saracen is miraculously revived, "reborn" through the sacramental mystery of baptism as a Christian, Sir Gawteir. Fellowship and charity prevail, and peace is re-established. In this sense the final scene of Rauf Coilyear is a narrative (as opposed to dramatic) Mummer's Play. It is thematically

29. Sir Edmund K. Chambers, The English Folk-Play, (Oxford: 1933), 4-8, 23-30.

30. Chambers, *ibid.*, 161.

unified, concerned throughout with the various manifestations of "courtasie," the virtue of utmost importance to a Christian knight. The concluding episode grows naturally out of the preceding humour, creating a "comedy" in the Christian sense of the term, the elevation of men, the salvation of souls, and the peace of God reigning on earth.

In this regard I think it worth pointing out that Rauf Coilyear has strong thematic affinities with at least two other earlier "serio-comic" English romances, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight³¹ and more especially Sir Cleges.³² All three tales take place in the distant past at semi-mythical courts--Charlemagne's, Arthur's/Bercilak's castle, and Uther's, Arthur's father, respectively--and all three are set at Yuletide, Sir Gawain on New Year's Day and Rauf Coilyear and Sir Cleges both significantly on Christmas Day. Each of these romances is exemplary in nature, concerned with the giving and keeping of pledged words and involving the "courtesy" of the knights in question; and each romance finally teaches a specifically Christian lesson regarding conduct. Each, curiously, employs a variant of the "mock-death-and resurrection" motif like that of the Mummer's Plays: Rauf and Roland convert a Saracen to Christianity; the grass-green (i.e. life-coloured) Bercilak has his head chopped off and suffers no ill or lasting effects from it; and Sir Cleges discovers cherries blooming in his garden in the dead of winter, token of his answered prayers, like the

31. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, 2nd ed. rev. Norman Davis, (Oxford: 1967). This poem also has formal similarities with Rauf Coilyear: it is composed in 100 stanzas (Rauf Coilyear has only 75) of long, stressed alliterative lines ending in a rhymed, short-line "bob-and-wheel" structure.

32. I refer to the edition of Sir Cleges in Walter H. French and Charles B. Hale, Middle English Metrical Romances, 2 vols., (New York: 1930; rpt. 1964), II, 877-95. I will confine my comparison to broad outlines.

virgin birth a miracle of mid-winter fertility and a variant on "mock-death-and-resurrection."

Yet, to greater or lesser degrees, each of the romances employs comic, fabliau-like elements within essentially serious (or joyous as opposed to humorous) frameworks. We have examined in some detail the humorous and ironic components of Rauf Coilyear. Sir Gawain and the Grene Knight, beginning with Yule festivities at Camelot and the hideously wonderful magic of the beheading game, pits Gawain's reputation as a lover against his reputation as a courteous and honourable knight. Bedroom scenes in which honour-bound Gawain gallantly resists the lady's amorous advances while her husband stays away hunting all day are essentially the materials of a fabliau;³³ however, it employs fabliau-motifs with an unusual subtlety, especially in its witty, playful dialogue and highly ironic twist-ending. In Sir Cleges, the poor knight is forced to promise to the porter, the usher, and the steward successively before they let him pass into court one third part of whatever gift King Uther bestows on him as a reward for his unusual Christmas offering of mid-winter cherries. Granted a gift of his own choosing, Sir Cleges requests twelve blows, which he proceeds to deal out evenly between the three greedy servitors in order to fulfil his pledge to them. This central episode too is a situation from fabliau literature. The story of Sir Cleges is more akin to Rauf Coilyear than Sir Gawain in tone, intention, and general theme. It does not deal with the humiliation of and mercy shown a renowned knight, but like Rauf Coilyear explores the final and deserved elevation of a noble but

33. Cf. J.A. Burrow, A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, (London: 1965), 74-77, who also suggests that the treatment of Gawain and his host exchanging their daily trophies in terms that equate money with love ("coin") is from fabliau literature.

poor man to a knighthood, honour and riches. But although the plot-lines are for the most part different, the general patterns and thematic parallels are remarkable.

Each tale involves the testing of its hero. These tests involve journeys to hostile places which they have not previously visited, and there overcoming obstacles until they have more or less succeeded in their quests. Each is set at Yuletide, and each offers a Christmas exemplum. In Rauf Coilyear there is a call for Christian unity in order to "fecht on Goddis fais," stressing the value of peaceful conversion as opposed to bloodshed. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight concerns caritas, and the right conduct of a Christian knight (courtesy, troth, honour) in this transient existence. Sir Gawain gives in to pride and the temptation to save his life, only to have these inadequacies of his faith painfully pointed out to him. Even the greatest of heroes is fallible and mortal, afflicted with covetise and cowardice (Gawain's "untroth," 2507-2509); the love of mortal things is folly; and one can only hope for undeserved mercy, like that of God's love for mankind. In Sir Cleges, the good knight's Christmas generosity in celebrating God's birth, which at first completely impoverishes him and his family, is ultimately rewarded by the King of Heaven and his mortal sovereign, Uther, King of England. Each tale finally involves charity. Rauf and Charlemagne exchange charitable deeds by saving each others' lives, and Roland extends God's charity to Magog. Sir Gawain is charitably spared a beheading, receiving only a cut on the neck for his one lapse of faith. Sir Cleges literally spends all he has on the poor in order to honour God at Christmas, giving lavishly to all and sundry. When shown God's charity in turn, the winter cherries, he takes a basket to his king with the intention of sharing them, and after some difficul-

ties with uncharitable men, is restored to his former wealth and position.

Christmas especially is the appropriate season for showing charity. Both Rauf Coilyear and Sir Cleges deal with Christmas gifts bestowed by sovereigns on their subjects; Sir Gawain is granted a stay of execution, as is Rauf, a chastening and edifying lesson which will last him all his life. The tales are consistent in their messages, set at the same time of year and offering striking parallels of theme and handling. They are romances balanced with humour and "high sentence." Without overstressing the suggestion, it seems to me that each of these romances functions much like a Christmas masque; if so, Rauf Coilyear may belong to a tradition far broader than previously imagined.

Rauf Coilyear is at once a Christian "comedy" and an affirmation of romance ideals. Its ironic structure builds on the interrelated themes of charity and social harmony. Both Rauf and Magog are outsiders, literally "outlaws." Yet, though both have been "self-willit ay" (909), they come to be incorporated into Christian society as beneficial members. Magog is baptised and renamed Sir Gawteir, marrying into the world of the haut courtois. Rauf, though already a married Christian, is figuratively "baptised" when the doomed Rauf disappears at Charlemagne's word, to be superseded by Sir Rauf, Marshall of France. Both achieve immediate success, swearing eternal friendship with Roland as equals. Temporal rewards for proper Christian conduct and active knightly virtues suggest the divine rewards they may reasonably expect to earn. The poem does not spell out a specific "moral," but it is highly exemplary. We are left with a joyous vision of personal triumph, temporal peace (including marital harmony), and

social unity, a vision of an ideal Christian world.

ii. A Comedy of Cupiditas

Rauf Coilyear is at certain points a tale concerning mistaken identity. Rauf fails to recognize Charlemagne, Roland's authority, and finally Magog's Saracen origins; while Roland and other Parisians do not initially perceive Rauf's nobility and true worth. By contrast, there is no mistaking the identity and abhorrent character of Patrick Adamson, the subject of Sempill's Bischoep of St. Androis Lyfe. Rauf Coilyear is ultimately a "divine comedy"; Sempill's poem, inversely, may be described as an "infernal comedy," a verse-catalogue of the sins of an Antichristian rogue. Adamson's life is viewed as a series of villainies and misdeeds parodying the majority of Christian ideals.

Both poems offer social messages. But, partly a result of historical circumstances, the poems are antithetic in aim, tone, and execution. Although chivalry was on the wane by the time Rauf Coilyear was composed, it was still so vital a force that the poet could expect to touch a "universal" public. The poem's ideal vision of a unified, peaceful, Christian society was one that remained comprehensive and appreciated in Catholic Europe for the next half-century or so. That unified Christian world view has largely disintegrated by Sempill's day. The Bischoep of St. Androis Lyfe, rather than having wide currency, is topical satire; and hardly fiction at all in that it concerns the life of a real person in a specific time. The poem is directed from Sempill's particular--that is, Reformation--point of view toward a rather narrow, like-minded audience. As the poems strive to attain different goals, the carefully-crafted realistic plot, the subtlety, ironic resonances, and playful wit of Rauf Coilyear give way to Sempill's sprawling construction, heavy-handed directness, and strident

invective. The Bishop of St. Androis Lyfe bears all the marks of propaganda in verse.

Sempill is for the most part competent as a satirist,³⁴ but no Dryden in skill. He confuses thoroughness with effectiveness. The Bishop of St. Androis Lyfe expends needless energy and diffuses its potency by attempting to include each of Adamson's reprehensible deeds. Thus the satire is too long, too loose a composition, and too repetitious. It is also too earnest, as Sempill's hatred for Adamson is both obvious and absolute. This hatred distances the reader from the satire by rendering sympathy with Sempill's position virtually unobtainable.

The poem as a whole suffers from excesses of all kinds, troubled by problems of scale, structure, and especially mood. The major difficulty with the poem as satire is that it lacks any sense of fun, a necessary comic tone. Adamson's disruption of grace is regarded as an insidious social menace; Sempill's angry tone, accordingly, is one of disgust and scathing vehemence. Sempill's function is to warn, to hold up Adamson's life as an example of how not to think and act in the new Reformed community. But Sempill does not merely find Adamson a convenient negative example, he despises him. The poem becomes wholly a satire of scorn, of serious ridicule, in which Sempill attempts to destroy the object of his loathing rather than correct the vices Adamson represents in mankind generally. Thus the poem's comic constituents are of a kind designed entirely to degrade and humiliate. There is no real humour--implying a degree of sympathy--but only ridi-

34. Cranstoun, op. cit., I, xxxvi, rightly concludes that The Bishop of St. Androis Lyfe, although "the most scurrilous and barefaced of [Sempill's] works," is "the crowning effort of his talent."

cule; and the poem's ironies are largely too serious. The laughter of incongruity has been forced out, overwhelmed by a wholly negative laughter of superiority.

Sempill enjoys a variety of rhetorical methods that inflict degradation, some of them comic. The simplest of these is direct insult. Sempill continuously calls Adamson "Howliglass" (51, 179, 198, et passim), after Eulenspiegel, the mischievous errant prankster of German folk legend; "Matchevellous" (39, 80, 200, et passim), or Machiavelli, by then a name synonymous with selfish guile, hypocrisy, and knavery; and "Lowrie" (8, 55, 284, et passim), the teacherous fox of beast-fables who combines these ignoble features. He spices these favourite epithets with a steady stream of others which appear less frequently: e.g. "lymmer" (3, 283), "ranungard" or renegade (10), "ane of Bacchus men" (84), "Placebo" or flatterer (744), or "turn coat" (787), among others. As this is direct and serious editorializing, relatively devoid of wit, there is a real question of comic intent. But even a heavy-handed satiric effect like the insult "bytescheip" (130), a witty pun on "bischoep" equating Adamson with a predator instead of guardian of his spiritual flock, may be said to differ in kind from Sempill's openly indignant cries of "Shame!" Compare, for example, "bytescheip" with the bitter irony of "brave ambassador" (579; my italics) and strong insult of Sempill's lament over Adamson's shabby appearance in London: "Alace! that Scotland had no schame / To send sic howfing carles from hame!" (585-86; repeated as variant, 633-34).

Unfavourable comparison, or negative allusion, is closely linked with name-calling. Carrying on the dominant technique of the poem's

Preface,³⁵ Sempill likens Adamson to the "evil" political figures William Maitland and Andrew Melville (39); to the devilish heathen prince cited in Ezekiel 37-39, Gog Magog (6); and to other wicked characters in the Bible (42, 280), Achitophell (2 Samuel 16), Triphone (1 Maccabees 12), and Ahab (1 Kings 21).³⁶ Borrowing a phrase from Sir David Lindsay,³⁷ Sempill makes use of ironically exaggerated impossibilia--

But guhen [Monsier] gettis yat geir agane
 Thair will na river ryse for raine;
 And, peitie, porter of hellis yeattis,
 That day this doctor payis his debtis,
 (822-25)

and

Bot when that gowne comes hame agane
 Winter salbe butt wind and raine--
 (1024-25)

35. The Preface sets forth the purpose, mood, and stylistic techniques of the poem; and, attacking the "Pestiferus prelati that Papistrie pretendis" (3) in general, Sempill supplies a rich parade of invective insult (dewils, venereal pastoris, placebos, libidinous drunckardis, degenerat, lyers in the latter dayis, reprobat, syrens, polluters, Epicurians, Antichristians, Bellie god bischops); unfavourable comparisons ("In rottin bosses no balme liquor lyes," "a painted fyre / But heit to warm you"); unflattering allusion (Balaam, Corah, Dathan, Amasias, Alchimas, Jason, Judas, Annas, Caiphas, Blind Baals bischops, Scribes and fals Pharisiens); and odious animal similies ("lupus," "vomiting thair fayth / lyk to an tyke," "scabbit scheip," "traytor tod," "swyne...in thair awin filthes," "voratious woulfis"). Many of these same accusations and comparisons, or insulting images, recurr in Adamson's Lyfe. According to Dr. R.D.S. Jack, "Mary and the Poetic Vision," Scotia, 3 no. 1 (April 1979), 34-48, Sempill and his Protestant fellow-satirists were masters especially of vituperative techniques. They made much of unfavourable comparisons with past figures. In vilifying Mary Stewart, for example, they likened her "to Delilah, being a betrayer of a brave and god-fearing husband; to Jezebel in her viciousness and in her having drawn her husband into a false religion; to Clytemnestra and Semiramis as husband-murderer and voluptuary...before finally plunging her deep in Hell" (p. 41). Their common satiric mood and techniques, like their aims, were limited.

36. All of these figures are deceitful, hypocritical traitors. Achitophell and Triphone--like the alliterative political trio Maitland, Melville, and Machiavelli--are crafty advisors of kings. Except Machiavelli's prince, these kings--David, Jonathan, James VI--rule over God's elect, whom Gog would overthrow.

37. Cf. Lindsay, "Complaint to the King," I, 40-53, lines 471-74.

as well as an extended simile when describing Adamson's two-faced treachery:

This poysoned preicheor of Godis word
Is not vnlyk ane suple suord;
For in the fyre when ye have heat it,
To ony syde you lyk to sett it
It will go worth and stand therto:
So will this duble doctor doe.
For greid of geir, and warldly graith,
On bayth the gaitis he grundis his fayth.

(748-55)

Insults, like asides, pour forth continually. And, interrupting the narrative, Sempill offers a lengthy binary comparison of Adamson with vice-ridden knaves. The first comparison is with a rascally servant of a French poet who engages in every variety of corruption (978-88). The second, more immediately relevant, is with a "reformed" but wayward church official, Alexander Gordon, the Superintendent of Galloway:

Lyk to the Bischop of Galloway:
But he was sum thing pure and needie,
And [Adamson] feinyet, fals, and gredie.
Galloway with no mater meld him
Except necessitie compeld him,
Taking the warld as God wald send it,
Having a noble hart to spend it.
Boy ay the mair this smatcher gettis,
The closer garris he keip the yettis;
Feiding his bellie and his bryde,
Begging and borrowing ay besyde.
Galloway was a man of gude,
Discendit of a noble blude,
Frank with his freind, forward and stout,
Having gude maneris to set them out:
And this is but ane carle, ye sie,
Ane baxteris sone of bas degrie,
Feable and fleid and nothing worth,
Wanting a face to set him furth.

(989-1007)

Adamson suffers badly in these comparisons, more wicked and despicable than other notable reprobates. Gordon, at least to Sempill's mind, has redeeming qualities (noble birth, frankness, manners, free-spending when he has money); and if he operates on the wrong side of moral law at least he has the excuse--albeit a false one--of need, compulsion

under necessity. Adamson, basely born and fittingly ignoble, has no such excuse but behaves badly by nature. His character is totally corrupt, and when contrasted with other villains turns out to be the lowest of the low.

Sempill disparages Adamson's physical offences as well as flaws of personality by using animal imagery, or the animal facts of life, to further debase his subject. Such imagery relegates Adamson to the level of beasts, making his acts and appetites seem too human (and at times disgusting) by focussing on vile aspects of physical existence. He likens Adamson to Cerebus, the "vglie hund of hell" (326); to "Lowry" the fox (passim); to an ox ("An bewebust in a bischops place," 694); to "ane hieland quow" (715); to "a sow" (1077) and a "swyne" (1086).

Most striking, however, are references to the Archbishop's maladies (150, 289), impotence (397ff.), and multitude of episodes of incontinence, drink-induced vomiting (142-48, 1053-63), and urinating (696-700, 720). Sempill's offended reports of Adamson's self-defilements are not comic, except possibly the broad irony of regurgitated red wine being mistaken for blood and so real illness by his family (1089-95). But in London, Adamson relieves himself of excess drink against one of Elizabeth I's palace walls; and this low episode of behaving like a cur obeying a call of nature is broadly buffoonish:

Into the palace are they past,
Which callit is the fair White Hall;
His pintle against the palace wall
Puld out to piss, and wald not spair,
Which is a thing inhibit thair.
Ane porter sone did him persave,
And to the bischop his blissing gave,
Betwixt the schoulders a royall route,
Turning him wodderschins about.
To scape the fray he was so fane
He put vp club in scheith agane.

(696-706)

Adamson, on an ambassadorial mission,³⁸ temporarily represents James VI at the English court. His tactless, hilarious, and possibly symbolic faux pas, comic in itself, conflicts ironically with his ambassadorial purpose. Comic exposure and the slapstick blows of the servitor add to the atmosphere of farce. And a jocular tone is sustained by Sempill's use of comically understated puns--the porter's "blissing" (a third abuse of the religious term to this point in the narrative), "royall route," and the euphemism of Adamson's "club"--and by Sempill's tongue-in-cheek assurance that such a deed "is a thing inhibit thair," as though it were acceptable at other palaces.

There is little to recommend the poem in the way of comedy. The degradation of Adamson is Sempill's primary objective; and he intends to incite the reader's rage and scorn, not laughter, at Adamson's antics. It is by now evident that, although comic elements are present (such as irony, puns, slapstick, anecdote), these elements are on the whole yoked to the service of heavy ridicule. Comic tone is therefore often swamped by Sempill's anger, acid spite, profound disgust, or general embarrassment; and by his propagandist's penchant for didacticism.

38. Because James had been negotiating with pro-Catholic powers, Walsingham was dispatched to Edinburgh in August 1583: "With his ultra-protestant prejudices, his presbyterian sympathies and his unrelenting hatred of Mary, he formed a very unfavourable impression of the situation. But his actions--lecturing James on the iniquity of changing counsellors without Elizabeth's approval, taunting him with his inexperience and lack of power, and declining to deal with Arran--rather encouraged negotiations with continental powers" (Donaldson, op. cit., 180). In December, Adamson arrived to treat with England. He was a high-ranking church official with a reputation for learning; but his character was doubtless known to James, for after all Adamson was under suspension and escaping excommunication for gross misconduct. In light of Walsingham's stinging visit, the choice of Adamson for his ambassador is a curious one by James, smacking of retaliation.

Sempill is not objective enough to seem the dispassionate and reasonable critic: he does not have sufficient control over his own emotions to produce a truly comic, and therefore effective, satire.

Nevertheless, Sempill exhibits considerable wit, especially in his choice of generic form. Sempill damns Adamson by means of association with the old religion. But, as noted, The Bishop of St. Androis Lyfe does not parody the saint's life tradition as such; instead, it straightforwardly chronicles the misdeeds of an infamous anti-saint, only broadly following the biographical traditions of saint's legends.

A saint's legend is "a narrative with the double purpose of honouring the saint and instructing the audience or reader in the significance of the saint for the Christian faith. Without this second element the saint's legend is only history or biography."³⁹ That is, "to be strictly hagiographical a document must be of a religious character and aim at edification," and such writings should be "inspired by religious devotion and intended to increase that devotion."⁴⁰ In short, a saint's legend is an edifying history of a religious hero, part biography, panegyric, and moral lesson all in one connected narrative, most often with an historical basis.

Sempill's Bishop of St. Androis Lyfe adheres to these principles, but with the inverse purpose of dishonouring a religious villain, a purportedly protestant minister. The poem is a connected narrative with an historical basis, and it is not merely the biography of a man

39. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Francis A. Foster, "Saint's Legends," in A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, op. cit., II, 411.

40. Hippolyte Delehaye, The Legends of the Saints, 4th ed., trans. Donald Attwater, (London: 1962), 3-4. I am generally indebted to M. Delehaye's excellent pioneering work in the following discussion of saint's legends' characteristics.

in a religious profession. Sempill's chronicle is of an edifying "religious character" in that it warns his readers against a man "contrair to Christ lyk Antichristians, / The plane polluters of his holie temple" (Preface, 125-26), a "tulchan bischop" who is "both art and part of papistrie suspectit" (Preface, 117). Sempill aims at unmasking a religious scoundrel, instructing his audience in Adamson's errors and devilish significance for true Christians, whom he glorifies. Panegyric is replaced by invective; and as Adamson is dishonoured, the ethical, political, and religious principles he upholds are likewise discredited. For the Reformed community, the moral lesson Adamson's life represents is a negative one, but indirectly reinforces the theological beliefs of extreme Protestantism.

As biography, Sempill's poem is unusually detailed and accurate; and in this regard is unlike saint's legends and romances, which are essentially mythic and not factual narratives. The traditionally effective method of relating a saint's legend was to present an abstract portrait of a mentally gifted, spiritually flawless, extra-human being which de-emphasized real personality and those defects and mortal qualities that detract from the saint's greatness or message. Most hagiographers held the classical view that there was little difference between history and rhetoric. Facts as such were unimportant, and what counted was the effectiveness of the lesson. The saints' mythographers were more frequently concerned with style than historical anxieties, and their main object was "to please the reader by interest in the narrative, beauty of description, and brilliance of style."⁴¹ Hence

41. Delehay, *ibid.*, 52-54. It is therefore not surprising to find educated men of the medieval period being shocked only by unpolished style; about errors of fact they remain, on the whole, uncritical.

the hagiographers' unconcern in regard to anachronisms, geographic and chronological impossibilities; and their thorough lack of interest in the reality of the historical personality concerned, the development of abstract "types" of saintly personages. While neither wholly myth nor strictly imaginary, the legends often connect imaginary events with real persons and fanciful stories with real places, or vice versa; and hagiographers display no scruples about bringing in parables or stories illustrating some religious truth or moral principle regardless of biographical veracity.⁴² Saints' lives became "programmatic," and the saints themselves characters purified of reality: "types" of good and bad emperors, imperial torturers, and wicked judges abound; and the saints are on the whole monochromatic, totally virtuous, God-inspired holy confessors, intellectually superior to their persecutors and able to undergo extremes of pain for their faith. The chief virtue among male saints is humility, and among female saints, chastity: and many themes and miraculous occurrences--e.g. healing the sick, casting out devils, resisting temptations, enduring physical hardship, etc.--are interchangeable among saints' legends.⁴³

Sempill, in contrast, catalogues in excessive and obsessive detail the faults and follies of an indisputably real man, a well-known contemporary not yet dead. Adamson, as an anti-saint, is intellectually deficient, spiritually peccant, and subhuman rather than extra-human. Sempill's method is to particularize rather than abstract. Adamson is flawed by characteristics common to many men--stupidity, selfishness, hypocrisy, ill-breeding, physical ugliness, gluttony, covetise-

42. Delehay, *ibid.*, 7-17, 50-51. There is a simple-minded process of "absorption" active, passing down heroic values from antiquity (often adapting classical lessons), making for collective greatness.

43. *Ibid.*, 19-28, 73.

ness, ambition, faithlessness--but Sempill strives to make these qualities uniquely Adamson's own. Thus no one is as reprehensible or more odious than Adamson (for example, the comparison with the Bishop of Galloway). For this reason, and because Adamson was still living and widely known, Sempill attempts to be factually accurate. When Sempill names a time, a place, or a person (witnesses, important people, victims) he is remarkably faithful to reality. To be sure, he animates "types" as well: English leaders and gentlemen are uniformly noble and praiseworthy; right-minded protestants can do no wrong; Adamson's victims are all helpless and innocent dupes. Nor is he afraid to resort to anachronism if it serves his purpose: he reports Adamson's "confession" that the archbishop patterned himself on Throckmorton in attempting to sow sedition (509-512), even though the Throckmorton conspiracy was not uncovered until later the next year. But in general this "warts and all" portraiture helps to build confidence in Sempill's fidelity and honest motivation, countering somewhat our awareness of his strong biases in selection and presentation of material. A generalized assault on Adamson would have made dull reading indeed. But a selective, specific chronicle of Adamson's aberrations--mercilessly true and giving the victim nowhere to hide and no possible excuse--makes for a more lifelike, spirited, and destructive pasquinade.

While there is no standard formula or "typical" saint's life, yet many poems in the genre follow a general, three-part programme populated with the types of characters briefly enumerated above. This programmatic quality is especially true of those legends dealing with martyred saints. The first part is concerned with a saint's nationality and parentage, pre-natal prodigies, signs of his future greatness as revealed in parental visions or infant miracles. The second part

chronicles the saint's lifetime, his childhood, youth, virtues and character, important acts, tests of intellectual or spiritual strength, miracles performed, and similar devotional biographic details. The third part deals with the saint's death, cultus, and miracles performed in the saint's name or with his direct intercession (if he or she is a martyr there is a stock pattern in death as well: arrest, confession of faith, hideous tortures inflicted by stupid and cruel judges, execution by sword, ax, or equivalent symbol of civil power).⁴⁴

Sempill adheres to this general pattern insofar as he is able. After a long introductory preface he begins the narrative-proper with an insulting account of Adamson's birth and parentage, comically reversing the characteristic expectations of a saint:

To all and sundrie be it sene,
 Mark weill this mater quhat I meine,
 The legend of a lymmeris lyfe,
 Our Metropolitane of Fyffe:
 Ane schismatyke, and gude swyne hogge,
 Come of the tryb [of] Gog Magoge;
 Ane elphe, ane elvische incubus,
 Ane lewrand lawrie licherous,
 Ane false, forloppen, fenyeit freir,
 Ane ranungard for greid of geir;
 Still daylie drinckand or he dyne,
 A warriare of the gude sweit wyne;
 Ane baxters sone, ane beggar borne,
 That twyse his surname hes mensworne;
 To be called Constene he thocht schame:
 He tuke vp Constantine to name.
 [Soon] to the schoolis this knave convoyes;
 Beggand his breid amonges the boyes.

(1-18)

This introduction is essentially a condensed flyting, a highly alliterative string of calumnies masquerading as information. Sempill equates Adamson with evil spirits ("ane elvische incubus") and with the enemies of God and not with God's saints or angels, calling him a

44. Delehaye, *ibid.*, 72-74.

schismatic descendent of Magog's infidel tribes. Sempill sets out Adamson's dubious heritage, mean birth and malevolent background, and the main traits of his character: he is a drunken, gluttonous, deceitful, hypocritical beggar, a lecherous fiend more animal than human (swinish, fox-like). Sempill begins forcefully, and holds nothing in reserve. Even as a schoolboy (and there is a sly pun on "knave"), Adamson, a baker's son, ironically begs bread of his fellow pupils. Though only a child, his personality is fully formed. He is a "perfect" inversion of all the virtues, a thoroughgoing anti-saint.

Adamson is still alive and active, and so his biography necessarily remains unfinished. Thus the third part of the saint's legend--his death, posthumous reward and miracles--is omitted. But Sempill finally promises to leave space at the end in order to add to his catalogue of infamy:

I will augment my bill
As I gett witt in mair and mair
Of his proceedingis heir and thair:
I sall leave blankis for to imbrow thame.
(1101-1104)

Nevertheless, despite the premature nature of any predictions, Sempill feels confident enough about the desserts of the archbishop to suggest that Hell will be his eternal reward. He equates Adamson with Satan's servants and the Antichrists of the latter days (Preface, 89-96), noting that "Plutois palice beis provydit for them" (Preface, 64).⁴⁵

The great bulk of the narrative depicts Adamson's nefarious tenure as archbishop, corresponding to the second part of the saint's life

45. Presuming to damn the object of ridicule, a morally odious practice, was a common technique of the Reformation satirists. Jack, op. cit., notes, for example, that Sempill was one among many who attempted to "Satanize Mary" in poetic memoirs (p. 44).

programme. "Adamson," as Sempill puns, "may weill be borne of Eve, / Taking [t]hir vices of his wicked mother" (Preface, 97-98). He is a complete saint of cupiditas, a living example of most of the Seven Deadly Sins (Ire excepted, but heavily emphasizing Avarice and Gluttony). The distance between Christian expectations, and the higher expectations of a church minister, and Adamson's actual condition could not be more pronounced. He exemplifies the perversion of every spiritual value.

Adamson, as a saint of cupiditas, inverts the true saint's qualities, comically overturning the conventions of a normal saint's life. He should practice humility, poverty, and chastity in order to obey Christian precepts and set an example for others. Instead he is proud (23), greedy (25-26), and not merely lecherous (47) but adulterous (393-411). He ought not to be interested, far less solely interested, in vain worldly honours and the stipends attached thereto, yet "His mynd was mair on heich promotione, / Groundit on geir, nor gude deuotione" (91-92). He is spiritually faithless, or at best displays a faith which he confesses is easily "ouerset" (340). He puts his "faith" instead in temporal powers, arriving at his metaphoric safe anchorage as a result of flattering friends in high places:

Erle of Mortoun gat the regiment,
Then sett [Adamson] to, with saill and ayre,
To seik some lowner harbore thayre,
And cast his anckers on the raid,
And long time with the lord abaid.
(154-58)

His appointment passes over any suggestion of merit. Adamson "toned his dussie for a spring" (180)--that is, flattered the Regent instead of prayed to God--until "with craft, this carlingis pett / Hes fangit ane grit fische in his nett" (187-88) and he secures the post. In ironic contrast, his predecessor, John Wyndram, stepped down from epis-

copal office because he "craved na digniteis prophane" (177). Adamson grounds his hopes on political favouritism, not on personal virtue and the Rock of the Church. He "anckers" on Regent Morton, the wrong kind of "lord."

Yet his worldly ambition pales before his avarice: "For greid of geir, and worldly graith, / On baith the gaitis he grundis his fayth" (754-55). A saint should be disinterested in earthly riches, idle temporal attachments which weigh the soul down to damnation. Adamson cannot accrue enough wealth to suit him, ironically breaking civil laws as well as God's commandments in order to obtain more. Throughout the Lyfe Adamson tricks or attempts to trick people out of what is rightfully theirs (compare the episodes with William Wyndram, 190-244; the husbandman Scot, 249-84; David Horne, 438-60; or George Drurie, 964-75);⁴⁶ he cheats poor merchants and creditors at home and abroad (463-90, 828-38, 1032-52); and he is forever "borrowing" things--money, books, clothing, furniture, even baggage--he has no intention of restoring (800-825, 904-911, 1016-31). These accusations are serious ones, only broadly ironic in the contrast between the reader's ordinary expectations of conduct--let alone saint-like expectations--and reality.

As he is irresponsible regarding his own soul's wellbeing, he is irresponsible toward the physical and spiritual welfare of those souls in his pastoral care. His treatment of the husbandman Scot encapsulates his short-sighted selfishness and destructive tendencies. Scot proves recalcitrant when taken in adultery (250-56); and Adamson lures

46. Compare the plot of Chaucer's Shipman's Tale, in Chaucer, D1709-2242. In his absurd and ultimately humiliating attempt to deceive Wyndram, Adamson boldly alters the letter signed by Morton: "He cutted off the bill abone / And filled the blank with falset sone, / Dischargine him the foirsaid sowmes" (212-15). Cf. Henryson's Morall Fabillis, 1276-78.

him home, ostensibly to see "Gif he culd lerne him to obey...the law of God and man" (260-62). Of course, Adamson is the last man capable of offering righteous counsel. The "duble drunckerd" plies Scot with drink and induces the incapable sinner to sell his land. Adamson then frightens him, and drives him into exile where he dies a pauper:

"Whairto this bischop tuik regard, / And enterit sone to Naboths yaird" (269-80). The comparison with Ahab (as a king the guardian of his people) taking Naboth's vineyard is grimly, ironically apt. Sempill fairly spits out the term "bischoep" as a vile insult, an ironic reminder that his title carries duties such as comforting, guiding, and succouring wayward parishoners. A saint's function is to glorify God and save souls, directly and by example; Adamson, the worst sinner of them all, destroys men. This too is a serious charge. It is one thing to dishonour oneself and appear ridiculous, weak, stupid, and vicious. But Adamson contributes to a parishoner's death and displaces his family, proving to be a predator to his flock, not merely negligent (Sloth) but actively harmful.

In the course of a saint's career we traditionally expect signs of God's favour in the form of miracles, for example faith-healing or casting out devils. The unsaintlike Adamson, in paradoxical contrast, falls deathly ill himself. Sempill is comically ambiguous about the cause, whether the illness results from the malediction of Scot's widow or the archbishop's vices and excessive habits:

Whidder her malisone tuike effect,
Or gif it was the gude wyne sect,
Or surfesting of sundrie spyces,
Or then a scourge for clockit vyces;
Bot sic ane seiknes hes he tane
That all men trowit he had bene gaine.

(285-90)

Sempill ironically uses this speculation to air once more Adamson's

abusive excesses (including the "cloaked" reference to venereal disease), obviously leaning toward physical rather than metaphysical explanations.

Instead of casting out devils, Adamson embraces black magic in his desperation. He puts his faith in "sorcerie," and not in Christian prayers or patience. His witches, relying on a repulsive as well as comic concoction reminiscent of Macbeth's weird sisters' horrid brew (295-310), leave Adamson unrecovered but comically manage to destroy a white horse, the "saikles beast" on which they try their medicine (311-12). Further consultation with a more powerful "devill" of a witch, compounding the sin, produces no improvement. Apprehended, Adamson is severely rebuked and the witches are condemned to burn; but Adamson contrives to release them in the night. The next morning, he offers what must rate as one of the most absurd and feeble excuses ever invented:

Into that dungeon was sic din,
As Beelzebub had been therin,
That never a man durst stire quhill day;
And sua he neckit thame with nay,
And brocht the teale bravelie about
How Pluto come and pullit them out.
(359-64)

Sempill's sardonically understated estimate is "Few or nane this Lowrie beleavit" (365). The appearance of fiends and hellish emissaries is not unknown in the saint's life tradition. But usually, as with St. Margaret or St. Juliana (cited above), devils crop up as unsuccessful tempters, not as diaboli ex machina rescuers of those truly in their camp. "Pluto" and Adamson are here one and the same, and in this sense his ridiculous fabrication is ironically true: a kind of "fiend" has succoured them. His release of Satan's servants from jail and the authorities' judgment parodies the idea of casting out devils, comic-

ally inverting traditional saint's life material by producing an incredible diabolical "miracle." Neither does Adamson experience divine revelations, as a saint might: he is more likely to be found "dream- and some devill he had sene" (1078), having nightmarish visions.

Saints, male and female, are expected to be chaste, to mortify the flesh and fight off all sensual temptations, real or imagined. Adamson, the saint of cupiditas, is contrarily worried about his failing, drink-inhibited sexual potency; and despite the warnings of the kirk to "trow na witchcraft" (368) he makes straight for the restorative services of one Alison Pearson. This final and lewdly comic encounter with sorcery is a closet-adventure not unlike the tenth tale of the third day in Boccaccio's Il Decamerone, in which a religious hermit teaches a maid how to put his devil back into her Hell.⁴⁷ In a heavily ironic passage, Adamson lays his complaint in her culpable hands, and finds he is able to rise to the occasion:

Without respect of warldlie glamer
 He past into the witchis chalmer,
 Closing the dure behind his bak,
 And quyetlie to hir he spak,
 And said his lome was not worthe:
 Lowsing his poyntis he laid it furth.
 Scho sayned it with hir halie hand,
 The pure pith of the pryoris wand:
 To help that raipfull scho had rest him,
 Whairfore, ye say, my ladie left him,
 For scho had sayned it tuyss or thrise,
 His rubigo began to ryiss:
 Then said the bischop to Jhone Bell,
 Goe, tak the first seye of hir yoursell.
 The witch to him hir weschell gave,
 The Bischops blissing to resave.
 What dayis of pardone then scho wan!
 The relicques of that halie man
 Micht save hir saule from purgatorie.

(393-411)

47. Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron, trans. G.H. McWilliam, (Harmondsworth, England: 1972), 314-19.

It is a scene which would adequately "grace" the bawdiest fabliau. Sempill makes comically effective use of double entendre (lome, wand, rubigo, raipfull) and ironic puns, religious language serving as euphemisms for the couple's sexual play. "Sayned" ("blessed") manually, Adamson's impotence disappears and he enjoys a "resurrection of the flesh," as Boccaccio would put it. In turn he urges his virile member, "John Bell," to make a trial of the cure. The witch is only too willing to provide her "vessel" to receive his "blessing," another perverted use of the term. Perhaps the most insulting comic pun is "relicque," wrenched completely out of its holy usage and implying the great age, the deadness of the archbishop's "lome." Sempill treats the scene as a burlesque of a religious ceremony. But not only are the puns comic in themselves, they are drawn from specifically Catholic religious language (holy man, "signed" or crossed, purgatory, relics, winning days of pardon) which would have for protestant Scotland very damaging associations. These puns place Adamson's abuses firmly in the Roman Catholic camp. Sempill's mock-jocular conclusion, expounding on the salvation of her soul, implies the opposite, damning them both in savagely ironic ridicule. And as Adamson is not chaste, he is likewise not temperate or sober-minded in satisfying other fleshly lusts, being especially liable to drunkenness (cf. 286, 143-52, 761-85, 1057-61).

Saints may be single-minded thinkers, but invariably they are theologically orthodox and usually depicted as intelligent as well as righteous. They out-debate ignorant heathens and are wiser than their ordinary fellow Christians. Among their works of faith is evangelical travelling to spread the true religion. Adamson also travels to for-

eign lands, in this case England,⁴⁸ and he preaches in the capital. But Adamson, the consistent anti-saint, is unrighteous in deed, foolish in thought, and theologically suspect, spreading sedition and heresy. Given license to preach in London, Adamson chooses as his text a political subject which could have seriously jeopardized his longevity had the English court been aware of it:

Of his auld sermon he had perqueir,
Bot they had never hard thame heir.
Of omnigatherine now his gloss--
He maid it lyk a Wealchman hose:
Tempora mutandur was his text.
(734-38)

Sempill comically suggests that Adamson has but one sermon; it seems new only to an unexposed audience. His gloss is a confused, catch-all jumble--particoloured like the proverbial Welshman's hose--on the text from Daniel 2:21, tempora mutandur: "and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise and knowledge unto them that know understanding." If Sempill has created this episode it is a subtle, witty piece of slanderous comic invention. Adamson is not merely an inept preacher, he makes an ironic, outrageous choice of topic. There were constant conspiracies against Elizabeth's life from Catholic quarters. The succession of the English crown was by no means a settled issue at this time, and in only a few months (May 1584) the Throckmorton conspiracy to invade England and free the Scottish queen was uncovered. Adamson's ac-

48. Adamson's mission for James was to seek "more straight league and perfect amity" with Elizabeth (Calendar of Scottish State Papers, op. cit., VI, 652: letter from Bewes in Berwick to Walsingham). As a token of his sincerity, James sent the remains of several border reivers who had plagued England: at the bottom of a letter from Adamson to Elizabeth dated 4 December 1583 (in another hand): "Certeyn heades delyvered by the B. of St Androwes" (ibid., VI, 667). Adamson's private mission was to try to strengthen the Scottish episcopacy.

tions are as audacious as they are foolhardy: he consorts openly with the Catholic French ambassador (756-65); he writes letters to various European states with a view to undermining the Scottish presbytery (510);⁴⁹ and he publicly preaches on the theme "the removing and setting up of kings according to God's will." Given the climate of the times he is comically suicidal; and his political activities reveal to Sempill a (damnable) sympathy with Catholics and counter-Reformation powers. Nor is this the sole occasion that Adamson displays an unseemly friendliness toward Catholics: he is shown happily carousing with the "obstinat papistis" of Paisley instead of attempting "to bring the lost scheip bak agane" (104-128); and he is suspected in Paris of "mumblin mennis" (1107-1108).

But Adamson is a worshipper of Mammon, concerned with "feiding his bellie and his bryde." He has only one real allegiance, and that is to Adamson; only one unswerving credo, and that is selfishness. Adamson is portrayed as a hypocritical opportunist attempting to curry favour in both camps. By way of illustrating Adamson's comically contemptible duplicity, Sempill shows him attending Mass with the French ambassador in order to dine and especially wine with him, and then racing hotfoot back to Lambeth and the Archbishop of Canterbury's table for more of the same (756-86).

Adamson's "geir"-grounded selfishness is completely antithetic to the Christian faith and the other-worldly ideals of a true saint. His every sin shows a total lack of proper spiritual motivation. He embodies a subversion of all the virtues and ethical commandments; and

49. Calderwood, op. cit., IV, 49-61, cites Adamson's letters listing proposals to subvert the Kirk of Scotland sent to France, Geneva, Spain, and other places.

he behaves in a malicious, irresponsible manner which is utterly detrimental to the functions of his earthly offices, temporal and spiritual. Or so, at least, Sempill would have us believe. "Litle merwell," Sempill comments, "in temporal cases / He had na will to give reward, / That to his saule had no regard" (939-41).

Adamson, however, is not merely a despicable man and failed Christian. He is an active servant of Satan, an Antichristian consorting with such devilish powers as witches and Catholics. And, as the "legend of a lymmeris lyfe" begins, Sempill declares him to be a "fenyeit freir" and "ane beggar borne." "Lymmer," according to the DOST, is a vile term of the strongest reprobation; it has hateful associations with the word "limitor," a licensed begging friar within fixed territorial limits. Adamson's worldliness, miscreance, greed, ambition, hypocrisy, lechery, and gormandising habits are the characteristic religious abuses decried by moralists of the anti-mendicant satiric tradition. Adamson is very reminiscent of Abbot Johine in The Freiris of Berwik and Damian in Dunbar's The Fengeit Freir of Tungland, to cite no other examples. Sempill in effect equates Adamson's sins with the worst abuses of the old religion, strongly suggesting Adamson's ill-disguised brotherhood with the mendicant orders only recently put down. Sempill thus doubly damns Adamson in the eyes of fellow-protestants, using the (Catholic) saint's legend form to report the life of a Reformation minister who is both a saint of cupiditas and closet papist.

iii. Narrative Design

Compared as narratives, Rauf Coilyear and The Bischope of St. Andrews Lyfe provide a clear example of the difference between story and

mimetic transcript. Rauf Coilyear is a story. It is a tightly constructed, interwoven plot: the fight with Magog is a second story, but it has been prepared for thematically, and is so skilfully conjoined with the story of Rauf's promotion that it seems a logical and necessary continuation. The story has a definite beginning, middle, and end, so that the transposition or removal of any of its interlocking episodes would disrupt the logic and unity of the whole. Rauf's upward movement from a poor and socially humble state to a rich and noble one constitutes a definite peripeteia (the baptism of Magog is a second peripeteia), and it is one accompanied by anagnorisis in all of the principal characters.

In addition, the story's appeal is relatively timeless and universal. The values explored and social "message" in Rauf Coilyear are broad enough to reach a wide audience, and are effectively conveyed in the action. That is, authorial point of view is concealed in the machinery of story-telling, and there is no direct editorial commentary in the body of the story nor a moralitas at its conclusion. Because it is a story, with a carefully crafted plot dependent on characters' motives and actions, its themes are subtly demonstrated instead of conveyed through any more overtly didactic method.

The Bishop of St. Androis Lyfe, a partly fictionalized biographical mimetic transcript, presents a complete contrast. It is loosely structured, episodic, and unfinished. Part of the difficulty in treating the poem lies with the fact that it is not, strictly speaking, imaginative literature. Cast in a narrative form, it is a verse satire; but it is primarily a biography. This structural problem attaches to saint's legends generally: they are a special form of biographical chronicle, subject to examination requiring criteria often extra-liter-

ary. In addition, Sempill's chronicle is completely shorn of the mythic qualities of saint's legends, rooted in the damnable here and now. He is confined to Adamson's known history, able to manipulate but not invent facts. Some of the episodes flow steadily in a logical narrative progression. Discounting the quick leap from Adamson's youth to middle age, and one lengthy digression (434-504), the chronicle of Adamson's misdeeds is continuous: Adamson filthily gains the archbishopric and from that position successfully cozens Scot; Scot's widow curses him, and he falls ill; illness leads to his dabbling in witchcraft; to escape excommunication when caught he flees south under the king's protection; and in London he makes a further shambles of his responsibilities. Thereafter, from the return journey north to the poem's "incomplete" conclusion, the narrative disintegrates into a confused and poorly structured hodgepodge of repetitive sordid episodes told against Adamson. Sempill reports each incident as it occurs or occurs to him ("returning to my text agane," 436; "some thingis, indeid, I have forget," 1015), on occasion digressing or jumping backward in time. Each further episode adds nothing essentially new but merely pads out the catalogue of infamy. Because these latter episodes especially are repetitive in kind they lose any inherent comic power and rhetorical effectiveness; they carry no compelling necessity for being included. The poem has a beginning but no conclusion; and it collapses under its own weight, as a number of the episodes could be excised or rearranged without harming the narrative as a whole. It lacks unity.

Adamson's lapses and misdealings are invariably discovered, and he attempts to escape the consequences with varying degrees of success. But there is no distinct peripeteia in the poem, comic turnings but no recognizable climax or point at which Adamson's state alters signifi-

cantly. He does not repent and enjoy a felicitous reversal; and he does not make faulty choices which lead to his suffering anything worse than minor setbacks, censure, or discomforts. He flourishes in a fixed wickedness--the major reason, I suspect, that his escapes attract such a vociferous response from Sempill. From the poem's first lines Adamson is presented as a wholehearted, natural villain; and the "legend" that follows simply illustrates this premise at length. From first to last Adamson does not change character in the slightest degree but remains static, comically mechanical and seriously incorrigible, a born reprobate. It follows that he does not experience anagnorisis. He does not recognize the moral state of his character and actions; and, though he promises to mend his ways when caught, he never changes or truly acknowledges himself to be sinful. He does not seem to choose between good and evil but behaves wickedly "by kynd," according to some sort of natural law. That is, he seems to exhibit no free will. Only Sempill (and a few select characters in the poem) seems to recognize the full depth of Adamson's depravity. Accordingly, he calls attention to the fact frequently, heatedly, and loudly in a continuous tirade of name-calling and editorial commentary. None of the essential qualities necessary to a story are present in the poem; they are unsuited to his purpose.

The formal limitations inherent in a mimetic transcript do not, of necessity, inhibit full aesthetic pleasure; but they do in the case of The Bishop of St. Androis Lyfe. The ethical bent of the poem likewise tends to inhibit pleasure. It is an overly didactic topical satire; it does not attempt to castigate vice in general, but is written instead with the intention of destroying a hated but relatively insignificant, powerless individual. There is no sense of the absurd evi-

dent in Sempill, a key ingredient in the satires of Dryden and Pope. The poem's comic components are bent toward character assassination. As it is topical satire, the poem's aims and timely relevance are too limited. In effect we are eavesdropping on a private quarrel. The poem's Reformation concerns we no longer find to be issues of any importance or wide social application, and we do not share the interests or values of its intended audience. Consequently, we are made uncomfortable by Sempill's obvious belligerence, by the strength of his attack and the weakness of his opponent. We are distant enough that we could say of Adamson, as Mark Twain once remarked about a deceased shyster, "I bear him no malice. And if I could send him a glass of water to ease his pain, I would." We are in a position to laugh at the inexhaustible variety and energy of human folly. But such a response is irrecoverably hampered by Sempill's strident, sour tone and ill-humoured, hostile, self-righteous aims.

English life.

WILLIAM DONALDSON

"The 17th-century was a shift."

Because of his well-known as the author of *James IV* we have come to know him as a historical novelist. But in his other works, such as *Robert Henryson*, although Donaldson's historical sense is still visible, it is overlaid with a sense of the older past, and though Donaldson was familiar with Henryson's reputation and presumably his work (there is no direct evidence of the matter), yet it is difficult to imagine of two contemporary poets less alike than Henryson and Donaldson. Donaldson-based Henryson is a learned yet not polished poet. His social structural mode is narrative; his vision is essentially Christian and universal. As he writes for all men of all times.

PART III: MIMETIC TRANSCRIPTS

Donaldson's *Robert Henryson* (191-82) is a "venerable manuscript" of the 17th century, and it is that he draws on older, frequently allegorical, literature to give his historical sources for the *Scottish Fabillie*, *Crane*, and *Henryson*, and the *Trojan* source *Treatment of Crassus*, and his

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Chapter One

WILLIAM DUNBAR

"For lawchtir neir I brist."

Because of his attachment to the court of James IV we know somewhat more of William Dunbar's personal history than that of Robert Henryson. Although Dunbar's presumed dates (?1460-?1513) overlap with those of the older poet, and though Dunbar was familiar with Henryson's reputation and presumably his work (there is no direct evidence of imitation),¹ yet it is difficult to conceive of two contemporary poets less alike than Henryson and Dunbar. Dumfermline-based Henryson is a learned yet not pedantic poet; his major structural mode is narrative; his vision is consciously Christian and universal, as he writes for all men in all Catholic ages (though of course with satiric references to particular contemporary abuses). His work transcends his immediate age and nation in that he draws on older, frequently allegorical, literatures (e.g. his classical sources for the Morall Fabillis, Orpheus and Eurydice, and the Trojan-matter Testament of Cresseid); and his

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1. The well-known lines "In Dumfermline [Death] hes done rounne / With Maister Robert Henrysoun" (81-82) in "Timor Mortis Conturbat Me" (No. 62), The Poems of William Dunbar, ed. James Kinsley, (Oxford: 1979), 180, confirm that Dunbar knew of him; and Roderick Lyall, "William Dunbar's Beast Fable," Scottish Literary Journal, 1 no. 1 (July 1974), 17-28, tentatively suggests that the beginning stanza of "The Wowing of the King quhen he wes in Dumfermline," placing the adventure in the royal burgh known to be Henryson's home, may be meant as a kind of homage to the older poet (telling a beast-fable set in Henryson's home town), an allusion calling up the Morall Fabillis in his contemporaries' minds. It would seem he was at least familiar with Henryson's Aesop. All citations of Dunbar's work are drawn from Kinsley's edition. Also consulted: W. Mackay Mackenzie, ed. The Poems of William Dunbar, (London: 1932); and John Small, ed. The Poems of William Dunbar, 3 vols., STS 1st Ser. 2, 4, 16, 21, 29, (Edinburgh & London: 1884-93).

humour is largely humane in its depth of understanding, sharp-witted yet capable of sympathy and gentle irony.

Court-based Dunbar, by contrast, is social rather than scholarly. He is chiefly a lyric, allegorical, and satiric poet, making a limited use of narrative; his canon is mostly occasional in nature and local in scope if not scale, pieces of immediate interest aimed primarily at a small and select audience; and though he employs irony, his humour may be basically characterized as lively and goliardic, relying on ridicule, invective, and scatological elements. Formally, Henryson seems conservative and less inventive. Dunbar, a superb verse-craftsman in the tradition of the French Grand Rhétoriqueurs,² is endlessly and energetically versatile in experiments of prosody.

Allowing for a degree of overlap, the difference between their artistic temperaments may be seen in terms of the difference between the intellectual (Henryson) and the witty (Dunbar), and between the universal and egocentric man. There is one further, and quite telling, difference between their outlooks and personalities worth noting. Dunbar, in "To the King" (No. 26), vigorously denounces the injuries done to his fame by the courtier Mure, who, the poet indignantly declares, "hes mangellit my making" and "dismemberit hes my meter / And poysonid it" (3, 8-9). The inferior product is damaging to the poet's reputation (and so livelihood), and Dunbar finally and typically proposes a sportive Yuletide punishment for the offender. Further, there are a number of petitionary poems to James IV in which Dunbar begs for rewards and favours, especially desiring a benefice.³ Beneath Dunbar's

2. Though, as is pointed out by Janet M. Smith, The French Background to Middle Scots Literature, (Edinburgh & London: 1934), 77, the heavy French influence "did not cramp his originality."

3. Dunbar, 97-98. See also the various poems to the king, Nos. 18, 19, 25, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, and 45.

play lie elements of jealousy and insecurity, characteristics wholly lacking in Henryson's canon.

These difference may in part be congenital, and may in part be related to the nature of Dunbar's occupation as James IV's pensioned "makar." As part of the court retinue with the status of an exalted entertainer, Dunbar would be expected to produce occasional verse (addresses, elegies, petitions, panegyrics, commemorative poetry); verse entertainments (pieces for tournaments and public occasions, masques, plays, pageants, allegories, comic songs, satires); and religious poetry (hymns, celebrations, meditations, and moralizing verse). These kinds of poems, one would assume for the most part specifically commissioned and largely formulaic if brilliantly and originally handled, tend to be ephemeral, written for a particular moment and audience, intended for instant aural accessibility at a public reading, and usually of short duration (both in physical length and in terms of lasting interest). Not surprisingly, such verse forms the bulk of his known canon; through it we learn something about Dunbar, and a great deal about his environment. Lyric poetry is the best vehicle for satisfying the needs and conditions imposed by the royal court; though whether Dunbar was naturally suited to the court's formal demands or bent his nature to fulfil them cannot be known.

In coming to Dunbar we have essentially left the realm of story behind. Aside from verse epistles and other occasional pieces, Dunbar's poetry may be generally characterized as lyrics, or allegorical and/or satirical mimetic transcripts, whether earnest or comic. With perhaps one exception, Ane Ballat of the Fen3eit Freir of Tungland, none of his "story-telling" poems are proper verse-tales but rather situational mimetic transcripts, such as the comic and satiric poems

"Schir Thomas Norny" (No. 27), "Ane Dance in the Quenis Chalmer" (No. 28), and "Ane Blak Moir" (No. 33). Often the "situation" of these anecdote-like poems depends on the reader's background knowledge of court life and personalities or of literary conventions, or of both in combination, to establish the context. His anti-mendicant satire, "How Dunbar wes desyrd to be ane Freir" (No. 55),⁴ for example, is a fantastic mimetic transcript mixing satire and dream-vision with, apparently, personal experience. In it, the poet-narrator and a fiend disguised as St. Francis carry on a self-damning dialogue until the latter makes a noisome departure on hearing the poet's history of himself as a novice friar. Whether the fiend leaves well-pleased or dismayed is not finally clear. The poem presents us the rudiments of a tale: a unified dream-context, two characters, an exchange of dialogue, and a flow of events (that is, description of past activity followed by what must be taken as an emotional departure in response). But the poem cannot be accounted a story, for it lacks a peripeteia, a reversal of fortune for the narrator (or fiend) dependent on actions he takes, though there is of course a comic reversal; and it also lacks anagnorisis, recognition in the characters or the auditors of a change in state.

Yet, while recognizing that, unlike Henryson, Dunbar may not strictly be accounted a story-teller, it is important to explore the nature and especially the satiric genius of his story-like poems. In

4. Dunbar, 165-66. I would note, regarding this poem, that I accept the argument of Priscilla Bawcutt, "Text and Context in Middle Scots Poetry," in Actes du 2e Colloque de Langue et de Litterature Ecos-sais, ed. Jean-Jacques Blanchot and Claude Graf, (Strasbourg: 1978), 26-38, restoring the original order of stanzas as found in the Bannatyne MS. Dr. Bawcutt's article appeared after Kinsley's edition of the poems had already gone to press.

doing so, I will mainly confine my discussion to six of Dunbar's major humorous mimetic transcripts, all of them satires: "The Wowing of the King quhen he wes in Dumfermline" (No. 37); "In Secreit Place" (No. 13); Ane Ballat of the Fen3eit Freir of Tungland (No. 54); Fasternis Evin in Hell (No. 52); "Tway Cummeris" (No. 73); and The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo (No. 14). These poems, though few in number, reflect Dunbar's typical attitudes and concerns, his satire ranging in tone from apparently lighthearted amusement ("The Wowing of the King") to angry vituperation (The Fen3eit Freir). The vices Dunbar chiefly castigates are pride and lust, thus several of the poems centre on love or women's frailties, falling strongly into the medieval anti-feminist tradition. All of the poems are court-related, either directly, as in the "Turnament" section of Fasternis Evin in Hell, or indirectly, with the standards of the court and courtly literature held up in the background for a comparison at least, as in his making light of amour courtois (e.g. "In Secreit Place" or the Tretis). The court is the undoubted centre of Dunbar's poetic universe.

The Fen3eit Freir of Tungland, as mentioned, is the only poem that may be properly called a story: the central character of Dunbar's abusive dream suffers a reversal of fortune stemming directly from moral choices he made and actions he carried out, a series of crimes against man and nature that finally go too far. The history of Damian, the false friar, is sketched quickly, reported rather than dramatically presented; his character does not develop but is "given" and does not change; and his motivation and inner life pass largely ignored--thus, in accordance with the satiric design, forestalling possible sympathy for the subject or giving away the poet's antagonistic game through obviously malicious imputation of motive. The poem, a quick sequence

of events treated very superficially until Damian's final, dramatic attempted breach of the heavens, is not fully satisfying as a whole action even accepting the chaotic dream-context, though it is a unified piece. A tale may be unsatisfactory, however, yet still remain a tale. But it can be argued that this is no story, that Damian remains inwardly unaltered and does not change his state but only his condition, that his fall in fact is not a reversal of fortune but simply another in a series of comic unmaskings of villainy. This view has much to recommend it, as the plot-structure is basically a series of crimes and unmaskings in a rising crescendo.

But I think finally we must say that Damian has suffered, not merely another unmasking, but a reversal of fortune (as indeed "evir he cryit on Fortoun, Fy!" 95). In spite of his previous failures the false friar was able to carry on successfully in villainy, adopting a new disguise. This time, though we leave him disgracefully grounded in a midden and so are not privy to his subsequent fate, the implication is that he has suffered a final and irreversible unmasking from which he will not recover. He is finished as a successful villain, overthrown once and for all by a moral universe. There is a strong suggestion of divine sanction in his ruin: his flight is not ridiculed as automatically doomed to failure--indeed he seems to succeed until attacked and forced down by the bird kingdom--but, like his alchemical experiments, is regarded as a disruption of the natural order that demands rectification. For a time Damian may successfully beguile men; but Heaven cannot be hoodwinked, and will not brook his pride. We must deduce without authorial help the moral choices Damian has made, but it is his sin of pride that foolishly leads Damian to over-reach himself and so come to be overthrown. His hubris and sub-

sequent heaven-governed fall are almost in the classical Greek mould, except he is a ridiculous rather than a tragic figure. In this reversal we have the necessary peripeteia, and so may call The Fen3eit Freir a proper story.

If The Fen3eit Freir seems to be presented on the wide screen, as it were, viewing a sequence of episodes from a distance, then "The Wowing of the King" may be equated with closet drama. Its balance of action with characterization is reversed from that of The Fen3eit Freir, so that we look closely at the characters and to an extent explore their motivations, while the actions they take are vague, deliberately obscured. We witness behaviour, not events. This planned ambiguity points up the comic method of treating a sensitive sexual liaison almost discreetly. Dunbar's poem is unified, concerned with a single episode (a seduction), and examines the characters in some psychological detail. But clearly no peripeteia occurs, and so we do have a story proper but a situational mimetic transcript, fantastic in that it is cast as a beast-fable. The wolf's unexpected interruption of the fox and lamb's affair is a comic reversal, but not a reversal of fortune for any character, for none changes in state (from self-wrought felicity to misery or vice versa) but only in circumstance. No character, that is, finally differs in condition from that in which they were initially presented.

This quality of remaining unchanged as characters by events is likewise true of the two gossips of the "Tway Cummeris," the two lovers of "In Secreit Place," and the two tradesmen involved in the hellish tournament of Fasternis Evin in Hell. Without character change there can only exist comic reversals of circumstance, spiritual or physical degradation that leaves their natures unaffected.

Without the required peripeteia no story occurs; thus these three poems are situational or fantastic mimetic transcripts.

The two gossips, for instance, do nothing physical but drink and talk, taking no action other than choosing to ignore Lent's abstemious prescriptions (while hypocritically believing that they are conforming to them). There is no reversal of fortune, they simply confirm their vicious and comic depravity in self-damning speeches, literally without rising from the couch. The two lovers, after prolonged and idiotic verbal encouragement, eventually talk themselves into making love. The lovers encounter problems when they embrace, probably impotence; but this mechanical failure is beyond their power to choose or control, and so constitutes a comic reversal but not a change in fortune. The scatological and other physical accidents which govern the activities of the incompetent jousters in Hell are similarly beyond their power of choice: again we see comic reversals, but no alteration of fortune. Indeed, their fate, damnation, has been decided a priori. We may speak of "their fate" collectively, for they are really indistinguishable from one another as characters. Both are equally degraded, suffering alike the Devil's displeasure; and of course neither changes from first to last. Of the other beings in Fasternis Evin in Hell none but Mahoun may be considered in terms of character at all: the Sins who dance in pain are allegorical caricatures, composites of qualities and not personalities; and the Erschmen and devils are groups, and not individualized. As for Mahoun, he can act but he cannot alter or be altered: he already made his choices and suffered his fate long ago. Like most divine personages (except perhaps particular saints and devils), it is almost better to think of the Devil as an anthropomorphic force, rather than as a character,

with certain wants and traits, incapable of change.

The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo is Dunbar's longest, most richly characterized, and most complex poem, weaving several thematically related components into a lively new whole. But despite appearances to the contrary, the Tretis also does not qualify as a proper verse-story. Aptly named, the poem is just what its title suggests it is: a treatise, "a literary composition dealing more or less formally and methodically with a definite subject" (OED). To be sure, the Tretis is dramatically presented, an argument worked out in the mimetic dialogue of three inebriated women; and in this dramatic format it may be compared with Plato's Dialogues. Like them, it presents a philosophical proposition, arguing perversely and so ironically for women's sexual freedom. More lively than a mere essay, the argument is enriched by the characters' humanness, their anecdotes, self-justifications, their thoughts and feelings. The three women are complementary, three versions of the same character, "the Married Woman," in different circumstances and at different stages of life. They offer a single experience, matrimony, from the point of view of being married to an old lecher, to a young lecher, and, having survived both as the Wedo has, later life as a merry widow. The poem, then, has an overlapping, or theme-and-variations, structure (echoed throughout at the verbal level), in which their marital experiences are discussed in detail, lamented over, and finally resolved in a perversely "idealistic" manner. The women are in agreement as to the problems of marriage, their desires and view of "the good life"; and they finally accept that the promiscuous widowhood the Wedo proposes offers them a perfect solution to their sexual and personal wants with none of the attendant difficulties of marriage. The argument, comically, is as thoroughly im-

moral as it is single-minded: their selfish desires and especially their final proposals invert the accepted views of society, and offend against the teachings of the Church.

But for all its structural complexity and character detail the Tretis remains a mimetic transcript of a debate and is not a story. No reversal of fortune, or even change of circumstance, occurs for the characters at the conclusion of their debate. This we expect, for the poem is intended to dramatize and comically resolve an argument, not tell a story chiefly with a view to satirizing married life. The Tretis is complex as a mimetic transcript, however, in that complete anecdotes and stories are incorporated into its structure. The second wife, for example, relates an anecdote of how she feigns illness at bedtime to avoid her husband's embraces (211-30); and the Wedo, similarly but more thoroughly triumphant over her spouse, tells the story of her marriage to a merchant, her "peddir" or "buthman" (302, 309), an episodic series of husband-degrading tricks (296-410). These personal histories may be properly designated tales, for the women make choices and take actions that result in felicity for themselves and misery for their husbands, reversals in which they recognize their triumph. Yet the presence of stories within the poem does not lift the Tretis as a whole to the level of story. No action, in the Aristotelian sense, transpires. The ladies leave the bower drunker and more jolly than they entered it, but their lives and natures at the close of the poem are no different from what they were at the beginning. As in the "Tway Cummeris," nothing has happened apart from discussion. The poem includes several minor humorous reversals, comic turns reported in the ladies' past activities. Yet the poem's major comic reversal occurs at an unexpectedly abstract level in the final two lines,

when the ironic poet turns a satirical demande d'amour of his own against the males listening in the audience: "Of thir thre wantoun wiffis that I haif writtin heir, / Quhilk wald 3e waill to 3our wif gif 3e suld wed one?" (529-30). He intends to set off another, real, debate, at least in the minds of his auditors if not in actuality.

i. Genre

Dunbar's unique genius in the tradition lies in his use of the personal voice, and his original use and comic abuse of conventional themes and forms. Dunbar's basic comic technique is to weave separate genres into an incongruous new whole, to mix traditions; or to play one convention off another or one convention against itself, testing its components within the limits shaped by tradition. "In Secreit Place," for example, as a parody chanson d'aventure seems to turn what can be either a serious or comic convention (a love or lust encounter) rather straightforwardly on its head; but it also satirizes the language and code of amour courtois by mixing it with nonsense in the mouths of "townysche" fools (10). Even the direct, anti-feminist "Tway Cummeris" manages to combine misogyny with religious satire by placing traditional anti-feminist materials in the context of Lent, doubly damning the women, making them comic failures as wives and, more seriously, failures as human souls. Though making wide use of conventional materials, each poem is tailored to a particular satiric use. This systematic mixture of satire and play with convention gives Dunbar's humour a double edge, providing the laughter of superiority and incongruity both from the same situation. Appropriately, as play is his method, play seems frequently his tone, disguising a more serious intent and giving his poetry the impression of moral neutrality.

Dunbar's "The Wowing of the King" plays with the conventions of fable literature, intermixing genres for humorous effect. It combines elements from the beast-epic with amour courtois⁵ language in a chan-son d'aventure encounter burlesqued to the level of fabliau, an encounter which is comic on a symbolic as well as literal plane. Where Henryson has enriched and expanded the fable along traditional lines, Dunbar has particularized the setting and narrowed the symbolic scope of his fable, reshaping traditional elements into a mimetic transcript which is unique in tone and purpose. Dunbar, employing a rollicking lyric verse form complete with refrain, rather than any usual narrative stanza,⁶ turns the beast-fables' conventional motif of a ravenous fox falling on an innocent lamb into a comic sexual liaison.⁷ This involves a corresponding shift in symbolic "appetite" from literal hunger (symbolic power abuse) to sexual hunger (the unbridled appetitive will). That is, Dunbar does not satirize the strong and evil destroying the weak and innocent, as Henryson does in the fable The Wolf and the Lamb, but merely unrestrained and ostensibly perverse--and so comically in-

5. I refer generally to the standard works on amour courtois language and codes: Andreas Capellanus, De Arte Honeste Amandi, trans. John Jay Perry, (New York: 1941); C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, (Oxford: 1936); W.G. Dodd, Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower, (Cambridge, Massachusettes: 1913). An excellent summary is found in Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, California: 1957), 11-97; and a reasonable if brief review of its tenets is set forth by Tom Scott, Dunbar: A Critical Exposition of the Poems, (Edinburgh & London: 1966), 21-29.

6. The six major poems here examined, save the Tretis, are cast in lyric verse-forms, often a feature of situational mimetic transcripts in Middle Scots. "In Secreit Place" and the "Tway Cummeris" also possess ironic refrain lines.

7. Lyall, op. cit., 20, points out that Isengrim, the wolf's wife in Le Roman de Renart, complains of Reynard's attempted rape; this is the closest parallel to Dunbar's otherwise unique sexually ravenous fox.

congruous--lust. The fables' agents humorously reflect the fallen nature of the post-lapsarian world.

In so doing, Dunbar has defused the inherent seriousness in traditional fox fables: his humorous manipulation of convention avoids any pain and so the intrinsically tragic interpretation of the action frequently demanded by the lamb's death. This enables him to maintain throughout a lighthearted, witty, and ironic tone. "Play" joined with comic wonder is Dunbar's main vehicle, emphasized in the action described (the fox and lamb continually "playit and made gud game," 4) and his handling of traditional material.

The reader must be familiar with fable conventions or much of Dunbar's joke is lost. Character traits of the actors are not delineated but assumed beforehand. As we have seen in Henryson's Morall Fabillis, the fox and wolf are both ruthless predators and, as here, frequently in competition with each other for the same prey. The lamb or similar "morsall of delyte" (23), as Dunbar puns, is likely to be their intended victim. The cunning fox, traditionally the wit-figure, invariably outsmarts his stronger rival, and such again is the case in this fable, in which the gullible wolf, the fox's traditional butt, is finally left "Protestand for the secound place" (68) in the lamb's affections. As in the Henrysonian fables, there is a comic interplay between the two worlds of animal and human, with a human narrator taking part in the animals' action as an observer and with the animals behaving both as animals (with physical features like tail and fleece) and human lovers. Yet the action is firmly rooted in the human social behaviour of courtly lovers at play behind barred doors, so the actors tend to be more humans in disguise than simply real animals following debased natural impulses or behaving unnaturally.

But the fox--traditionally a crafty hypocrite, deceitful flatterer, and symbol of the perverted will--is in Dunbar's fable a somewhat clumsy, unsubtle, and overeager courtly lover taking the direct approach instead of the flatterer's road to the object of his affections. Embracing his lady-lamb, he "lowrit on growf and askit grace" (12)--that is, in grovelling for her sexual favours he adopts the traditional servile posture of a courtly lover, and behaves like a young puppy (he "todlit with hir lyk ane quhelp" 11). There is no cunning here, none of the clever hypocrisy of Henryson's fox cozening a vain and foolish cock. Through comic imagery Dunbar makes the fox's love appear to be adolescent folly, courtly love play that conforms to the Ovidian notion that love suspends one's reason. The lamb, for her part, coyly cries "Lady, help!" (13), presumably calling on the Blessed Virgin to protect her. It is an ambiguous gesture, for what appears to be a plea out of genuine distress would, in light of her subsequent behaviour, be interpreted ironically, as an expected and mock-indignant response from a woman following the rules of the love-game. Calling on Our Lady to protect her chastity is appropriate, but reminiscent of Alesone's hypocritical prayer to the Blessed Virgin in The Freiris of Berwik. And, of course, in the beast-fable context this is an incongruous human reference.

An expected emphasis on the fox's mental prowess is played down comically in favour of his physical attributes: "The tod wes nowder lene nor skowry-- / He wes ane lusty reid haird lowry, / Ane lang tailed beist and grit with all" (15-17). His colour corresponds to his passionate, lecherous designs on the lamb, and the reference to his long red tail carries obvious sexual connotations. The natural colour and physical details of the fox have been made to serve Dunbar's situation

as an ironic double entendre. The epithet "fals" fox (37), usually applied to his selfishly motivated flattery, is punningly bent to apply to his promises of loving fidelity.

This focus on physical elements is continued in his preference for "3ung and tender" lovers as opposed to his lack of interest in older married women, the "3owis auld, tuch, and sklender" (24-25). It follows its own comic logic and corresponds to convention--especially in using the familiar language of comestibility in reference to the sheep--but for unconventional reasons. Henryson's foxes likewise fall on a kid or a lamb, young animals and so of tender and more savoury flesh; and because they are more helpless and more innocent, emphasizing foxish cruelty. Dunbar, punning ironically, uses the convention to point out the fox's understandable sexual predilections. But, as I shall presently argue, he comically plays off the notion of the young and tender lamb's "innocence."

The chief trait of Dunbar's fox is passion, not, as is traditional, reason (however perverted), misuse of the body and only incidentally of the mind. The wolf is fooled--unusually, not contributing to his own downfall--but the fox escapes detection in a way further pointing up emptiness of intellect. Like Byron's Don Juan, and virtually as unable to help himself, the fox effects his escape from the guardian wolf by grovelling at length beneath the "lambis skin" (the rough equivalent of hiding underneath a woman's skirts), comically debasing himself, and relying on the silence of the lamb's duenna-like companions, "the 3owis besyd" (58-62). (The phrase "plat doun on growf," 58, is a subtle comic twist, ironically referring back to the fox's initial lowering "on growfe," 12, to win her affections; and the phrase "He crap als far as he micht win," 59, describing his attempts to hide, is

comically ambiguous, a possible sexual double entendre.) Although the fox is styled "this wylie tod" (58), his expedient manoeuvres are humorous but not clever, depending too heavily on the discretion of others and not his own artful dodging to be considered witty or in his personal control. His spiritual state is reflected in his physical debasement.

His victim, the lamb, accepts his rough embraces "And lute him kis hir lusty face" (32-33) instead of sensibly fleeing "his girnand gamis" (34). This is a highly unconventional thing for the lamb to do, and Dunbar continues to call our attention to their traditional enmity with the comically twisted mention of "girnand gamis." The lamb, unfrightened and too compliant, is correspondingly unconventional in terms of the beast-fable though a conventional courtly lover. Dunbar leaves her motivation ambiguous, and it is possible to read her as "this innocent that nevir trespass" (31), at least until the pair disappear from sight behind closed doors (46).⁸ She is described throughout as "silly" (18, 40, 59), which means variously innocent, trusting, helpless, foolish, or, applied ironically (as at line 59), it is a sexual pun. I suggest such epithets, and references to her inexperience, must be read ironically in light of the whole fable: the lamb comes to take an active and acquiescent hand in her seduction.

Coyness is an expected stance adopted by ladies participating in amour courtois, but eventual surrender to a suitable gallant is gener-

8. Lyall, *op. cit.*, 22, hesitates because of the ambiguous elements in the poem to assert the lamb's guilt: "the tone of the stanza (36-42) and the preceding one seems to suggest that the lamb is gullible to the point of culpability" (my italics). His caution is admirable, but despite Dunbar's non-committal ironies I think the lamb's culpability is understood to be taken for granted, especially in the extent of liberties she grants the fox (cf. 29-30), her "fleeing him not" (20), her gamesmanship at courtly love, and final surrender.

ally understood. Indeed, the expected pattern is for the lover to experience and suffer under the lady's disdain, to bear gladly her caprices and obey her smallest whims, with physical contact between them in the early stages of the affair out of the question. The fox's love-making has a plain and earthy objective (he "wald haif riddin hir lyk ane rame," 6); and literally his paws are all over her from the start of their "game" ("He braisit hir bony body sweit / And halsit hir with fordir feit," 8-9; and "He grippit hir abowt the west / And handlit hir as he had hest," 29-30). It is a humorous and realistic break with traditional expectations. The lamb does not reject his crude advances, but rather "tuke hert that scho wes handlit fast" (32), a line that comically undermines the ironic narrator's previous assurance of her never having transgressed (31). Hardly disdainful, "scho fled him nocht" (20) and "schup nevir for till defend hir" (27). Despite the conventional colour symbolism of white (lamb-innocent) versus red (fox-passionate), we cannot be expected to take seriously her "credence" (41) in the fox's punning and blasphemous oath not to "tuich hir prenecod" (38-39) when we consider their behaviour heretofore. Dunbar is playing ironically with traditional expectations: the conventional lamb-as-innocent-victim has been wittily replaced with a willing conspirator in love. This is shown in their rapid retreat behind closed doors and especially in her efforts to hide her lover from the "ombesetting" wolf (50-56), secrecy being a convention demanded by amour courtois and also a comic necessity to escape danger. The gulled wolf also plays his appropriate unconventional part. He is guardian of the lamb, though whether symbolically as parent or rival lover or husband is not made clear; and instead of being a ridiculous figure, he is ludicrous, tricked by others but not particularly weak

morally or intellectually.

Fable satire, the reproof of the whole "misleuing / [Off] man be figure of ane uther thing," is one of the primary conventions of the genre;⁹ and the satire could be applied specifically as well as universally. Noble the lion in Henryson's The Trial of the Fox and The Lion and the Mouse, for example, represents misgoverning princes in general and probably the abuses of James III in particular. If we accept the Bannatyne title of Dunbar's poem as genuine (it is untitled in the Maitland Folio), Dunbar's satire is likewise doubly powerful, not only mocking courtly love and reproving perverse lust but satirizing the philandering of James IV.

The ascription of symbolic identification is one which only Dunbar himself could have made authoritatively,¹⁰ and I assume that the title in the Bannatyne MS., "The Wowing of the King quhen he wes in Dumfermline," is Dunbar's own or a variant thereof. The internal evidence lends some support to the title, especially in the description of the red-haired fox (15-17) and the use of the pun "he gaif hir grace" (47; "grace," as noted in line 12, associated with sexual surrender in

9. Given the subject of Dunbar's fable, Henryson's fuller explanation takes on added significance: "mony men in operatioun / Ar like to beistis in conditioun. / Na meruell is, ane man be lyke ane beist, / Quhilk lufis ay carnall and foull delyte" (Prologue to the Morall Fabillis, 6-7, 48-51).
10. James Baxter, William Dunbar, (Edinburgh & London: 1952), 51, sees the poem itself giving no indication of royal identification--which strengthens the argument that none but Dunbar could have known the symbolic valuations. Scott, op. cit., 211-16, tacitly assumes the equation of James IV with the fox and the lamb a callously mistreated mistress. Lyall, op. cit., 25, regards this identification as "an optional extra," not necessary for an interpretation of the poem "but compatible with it." The fable does stand on its own, and I have discussed it primarily on its own terms without reference to the identification of the king; but its special satirical power diminishes without the equation of James IV with the fox.

amour courtois, is here comically inverted, for "grace" is usually granted by the woman to her lover). But such hints do not in themselves suggest the royal identification, nor do they point toward any reason why Dumfermline is specified as the locale. Conventionally, as in Henryson, the lion is equated with the king, not the fox, another satiric break with tradition on Dunbar's part. Convention is being played with, and provides no clue in identifying its subject. It seems unlikely that Bannatyne made a shrewd guess. Rather, having no apparent authority for the ascription, he copied what came before him, the provenance deriving originally from Dunbar.

Much of the poem's comic potency, in fact, resides in our belief that the fox is the wayward Scottish king. It is not comic simply because the king is expected to be a pillar of morality, leading an exemplary and irreproachable life--though something of this attitude may be involved. In the second tale of The Thre Prestis of Peblis,¹¹ for example, Fictus the wise "Fool" counsels his womanizing king (who through "lichtnes did lig in Lamenry," 814) that "To ly with wemen and of law degrie" is "Aganis 3our Quens wil and Majestie" (911-12); and it is generally recognized that the king's "lichtnes of delyte" is "fantasy...and richt grit foly" (986-88), a foolish weakness leading to ill fame if nothing worse. Although in context Fictus' speech aims at prying the king away from his mistress and returning him to his queen, no doubt there was some general acknowledgement that unchecked appetite in a king (as indeed in any man) is troublesome and disreputable. Yet mistresses of the king were kept on the government payroll, and illegitimate children were raised to high office: a king would

11. The Thre Prestis of Peblis, ed. T.D. Robb, STS New Ser. 8, (Edinburgh & London: 1920), 28-44.

not be reproached merely for extra-marital indulgences. James, in fact, seems to have been rather proud of his philandering.

The king has made himself ridiculous, not as a man only but as a king; and this is the subtle point of Dunbar's satire. The king is the head of the nation, yet he makes himself servile to a woman, frisking around her like a love-struck puppy, prostrating himself before her, begging for her favours, and eventually debasing himself. Though a commander of armies, he renders himself absurdly impotent before the indignant wolf, cringing behind a woman's skirts because of the compromising situation in which he finds himself. The conquest of his reason by his will reduces him to ridiculous vulnerability. There is a comic contrast set up between the ideal image of a king and the mortal reality, an acutely ironic discrepancy between a person of supposed power, dignity, intelligence, and high social station as against the fawning, cowardly, compromised whelp he has become. Instead of the usual symbolic equation of the lion and king, James has left his normal realm and descended to the ordinary level of a creature known for his appetite and perverted reason. At this moment, ironically, the seat of power lies between a woman's legs. And yet the poet, keeping up a tone of mock-wonder and delight, seems to approve of and be amused by the lustful spectacle. He is careful not to make overt judgments or give offence. The impossible adventures of the fox are ridiculous in themselves, absurd in his choice of love-partners; but the effect of this ideal-real contrast is heightened by the poet's knowing, discreet, and carefully ambiguous commentary on the action in his ironic refrain line: "And that me thocht a ferly cace."

Further, the identification of the fox with James IV provides another comic level of interpretation regarding the lamb. The fox is

described as having a predilection for tender young things. But the king is no ordinary courtly lover. The lamb, confronted by her amorous sovereign, is placed in a delicate situation, for she can hardly refuse. Even if she is already married--and I suspect the wolf represents her husband rather than her father, as the fox and wolf are invariably rivals and the wolf's parentage of the lamb is highly suspect--courtly love provides for adulterous affairs. And if she is free, the elevated status and honour of being the king's mistress is not to be lightly scorned. She behaves coquettishly, saying no with her mouth ("Lady, help!") but yes with her body ("Scho tuke hert that scho wes handlit fast"), and this we might expect from an interested, and skillful, courtly lover. But even if she is not interested in James as a man, and made genuinely uncomfortable by his advances, she has little choice. She has to play her part carefully, so as not to offend the king--much as the poet has to be careful. Ironically, the old ewes as well are obliged not to interfere in the king's affairs, and later to keep quiet and protect their king from discovery. The situation is highly complex and highly ironic. Dunbar seems to be reflecting on the discrepancy in their social status in commenting on their "size" in musical imagery: "The silly lame wes all to small / To sic ane tribbill to hald ane bace" (18-19); strangely, the male has the treble voice and the female attempts the bass. This arrangement expresses a high-low relationship, the king of course in the upper range; and in addition supports the sexual motif, suggesting the physical image of the king above and his lady under him. When the poet notes that "Scho fled him nocht--fair mot hir fall!" (20), and "scho schup never for till defend hir" (27), we have to wonder whether she plays the part of a courtly lover gladly or out of feelings of obligation. If she is

distressed, and her "Lady, help!" is heartfelt, her coquettishness takes on an added ironic dimension. I have argued that she is seen to be a willing participant in the affair, and so she seems. She is compliant, but ambiguously so.

Amour courtois conventions also provide the satiric basis of "In Secreit Place," comically degrading the code of the religion of love--by Dunbar's age long subject to burlesque¹²--to mindless formula surrounding earthy satisfactions. The initial speech of the young "bern" (a term for "lover" from the romances, here used satirically) echoes the language of courtly love in rhyming alliterative lines that pile up endearments in a quick and jogging meter:

"My hunny, my houp, my hairt, my heill,
I haif bene lang 3our lufar leill
And can of 3ow gett confort nane;
How lang will 3e with denger deill?"

(3-6)

His complaint is standard as a courtly lover: he has long been a loyal devotee of love unable to get "confort" (a variant of the euphemism "grace" and "mercy," sexual surrender) from his disdainful and haughty ("dangerous") lady. His object, of course, is to get her to bed, but he adopts the conventional posture, serving her and begging her favours and mouthing the appropriate words. Dunbar immediately sets up a contrast between his words and his comically uncouth behaviour and appearance (8-12), pointing out that he is a far cry from the ideal gallant,

12. Smith, op. cit., Introduction, xvi and xxiv, notes that "the ideal of courtly love, which colours the literature...and indeed the whole life of medieval France, never took root in Scotland." Nevertheless, though partly a fiction, the codes of amour courtois were the accepted formula surrounding love, and its tenets could be used seriously as in The Kingis Quhair, The Testament of Cressied, or The Goldyn Targe. Any humorous view of love will almost necessarily refer back to the conventions, rules, and language of this code.

"townysche, peirt, and gukkit" (10). The poet then comically negates the lover's idealized expressions of love by re-stating his bedroom objectives in the plainest terms:

He clappit fast, he kist, he chukkit
As with the glaikkis he wer ourgane--
3it be his feiris he wald haif fukkit.
(11-13)

The lover's exaggerated antics are rendered doubly absurd by the narrator's short, frank, and pointed evaluation.

The townish lover's uncoy mistress, prefiguring in her way Suckling's "Out upon it! I have loved / Three whole days together," sardonically acknowledges their long devotion: "saif 3ow allane / Na leid I luvit all this owk" (26-27). This admission follows her initial, delightful, sensually empty guffaw, "Tohie!" (22), indicating that she is far from aloof or adverse to his suggestions. During the course of their prolonged exchange of absurd endearments she admits that "3our musing wald pers ane hairt of stane: / Sa tak gud confort" (40-41), with a pun that echoes his initial request comically granting his immediate desires despite his minimum of skilled persuasion.

Their speeches, not merely chockablock with ridiculous "sweet nothings" and obscene suggestions based on absurd food, plant, and animal imagery, are comically needless: both are eager to mingle "thair bewis...in ane" (61), a return to overly nice comic euphemism. The substance of their courtship--full of obscene or pejorative terms turned into compliments or endearments ("tirly mirly," 46; "cowhuby," 58), ridiculous similes ("sweit as ony un3eoun," 53), incongruous contrasts and juxtapositions ("My huny soppis, my sweit possoddy," 30), and romantic tributes negated by physical crudity (33-34)¹³--is humor-

13. See Dunbar, notes, pp. 256-58.

ous in itself. But Dunbar's joke rests equally on the exaggerated length of time the willing pair take in getting down to their real business. At the end of their dialogue they conclude their agreement as traditional courtly lovers. He properly presents her a gift jewel (though conventional, such payment cannot help casting a prostitutional light on the proceedings); and she, punning, grants him sexual "mercy": "He gaif till hir ane appill ruby; / 'Granmercy!' quod scho" (57-58). This is yet another formal, exasperating delay before they begin to play what "thay call the dirrydan" (60), that is, enjoy a Middle Scots tumble in the hay.

After so long a comic build-up, how could they fail to have absurd problems? She is obviously unsatisfied: "'Fow wo,' quod scho, 'quhair will 3e, man? / Full leis me that graceles gane'" (62-63). "Quhair will 3e, man?" is ambiguous, suggesting either he leaves her too soon (meaning "where are you going?"), or, if there is a pun on "will," impotence, probably the latter, as there is a comic tradition of male impotence in bawdy Middle Scots verse.¹⁴ In either case she is not happy. The likelihood that he suffers impotence is strengthened if we accept that there is a pun on "graceles gane," that "ugly face" is a double entendre for the penis. Her refrain line means "Full dear to me is that ill-favoured face"; and, though silly, it is possible to read it literally. But envision her saying that while staring at his codpiece. She continually speaks of "it" in the abstract, as "that graceles gane" and not "your graceles gane," even though she has been addressing him directly in the preceding lines (e.g. "I am applyid to 3our opin3ion, / Full leis me that graceles gane," 55-56). Switching

14. Impotence as a comic motif is discussed more fully in Chapter Seven, pp. 458-63.

to speak impersonally of his "ugly face" suggests her affection for him is rooted in his sexual instrument. A sexual pun on "graceles gane" adds comic reverberations throughout the poem, and especially flavours with comic poignancy her betrayal in the context of the will's final failure. Like Henryson's Robene and Makyne, which incongruously put amour courtois rules in the mouth of a pastourelle heroine, Dunbar's "In Secreit Place," though for satiric rather than humorous purposes (Henryson does not overtly satirize either of his characters), parodies the language and ethics of his "townysche" courtly lovers juxtaposed ironically in the debased context of a comic chanson d'aven-ture tryst.

Dunbar makes the most extensive use of amour courtois conventions in The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo. Accepted straightforwardly as desirable by the women, the tenets of fine amour form the backdrop that colours their whole dialogue. They are assembled in a make-shift Court of Love presided over by the Wedo, who proposes a sportive demande d'amour which they will discuss:

"Quhat mirth 3e fand in maryage sen 3e war menis wyffis;
 Reveill gif 3e rewit that rakles conditioun,
 Or gif that ever 3e luffit leyd upone lyf mair
 Nor thame that 3e 3our fayth hes festnit for evir,
 Or gif 3e think, had 3e chois, that 3e wald cheis better.
 Think 3e it nocht ane blist band that bindis so fast
 That none undo it a deill may bot the deith ane?"

(42-48)

The question itself--the premise behind it--is posed ironically, expecting an anti-husband tirade to follow. She actually means to ask "what sorrow" instead of "what mirth." She emphasizes the life-long bond of marriage, and refers ironically to marriage as "that rakles conditioun" and "ane blist band that bindis so fast." Her calculated sarcasm, which could be interpreted literally by an audience as yet unaware of what she intends, draws forth the pent up venom of the younger wives.

The substance of their debate concerns the impossibility of love within marriage--an accepted fact of the religion of love--and disgust at the curtailment of freedom by marital obligations. Marriage, like most medieval contracts, assumed a subjugating lord-vassal relationship, the husband dominating. Naturally held to be inferior, women understandably craved actual "maistrie" in marriage, and used sex as the key to obtaining it. The first wife partially succeeds in garnering such power by demanding payment for sex in the form of clothing or jewels (133-43), as the Wedo had in her first marriage by procuring land for her sons (292); and the Wedo completely succeeds in dominating her second mate (296-409). Marriage seems to be a power-game, a test of wills. This is not surprising, for these ladies belong to the nobility. As such, they would often be regarded as no more than chattel to be traded for land, money, alliances: marriage among the noble classes tended to be arranged for business reasons and rarely for reasons of the heart. Thus, if the ladies wished to love, the rules of amour courtois permitted them to seek gratification outwith their marital bonds, and this naturally required affairs of the heart to remain secret. The Wedo confesses that, when she was married to an old man,

"I had a lufsummar leid my lust for to slokyn,
That couth be secrete and sure and ay saif my honour
And sew bot at certane tymes and in sichir placis:
Ay quhen the ald did me anger with akword wordis
Apon the galland for to goif it gladiit me agane."

(283-87)

Her hand belongs to her lord, who demands obedience and clearly dominates in the house. But her heart belongs to her young lover, who not only satisfies her but possesses the necessary quality of surety, of being secret and careful and so protecting her reputation. Yet we note, mixed in with the language of courtly love (secrete, honour, galland), her appropriate if unintentionally ironic reference to her

"lust."

Courtly love is a game set up and controlled by women to satisfy their particular wants and demands, to hold men in subservient positions and yet enjoy sexual fulfilment. Another commonplace, closely allied to the impossibility of love within marriage, is that old husbands are never sexually satisfying and indeed are usually physically repellent. The first wife's husband admirably illustrates this: he is personally repugnant--"ane wallidrag, ane worme, ane auld wobat carle" (89), and so on for thirty graphic lines--and a sexual failure, "wastit and worne fra Venus werkis / And may nocht neit worth a bene in bed of my mystirs" (127-28). Ladies involved in amour courtois are not supposed to give in readily to a suitor but should be "dangerous," that is, disdainful, hard to get--a feature we have already seen tested comically in "The Wowing of the King" and "In Secreit Place." The first wife ironically turns this disdainfulness against her husband: "Ay quhen that caribald carll wald clym on my wambe / Than am I dangerus and daine and dour of my will" (131-32), a comic misuse of love's conventions that inverts accepted moral codes. For these women power means the freedom to find new sexual gratification if the present partner is dissatisfying. Both wives wish fervently that they could be as free as they imagine the birds are, that they might "cheis, and be chosin, and change quhen [they] lykit" (75, 208). The unencumbered and independently rich Wedo has in her way earned that freedom, and generously proclaims that all lovers are welcome: "Thar is no liffand leid so law of degre / That sall me luf unluffit, I am so loik hertit" (497-98). Indeed, she will be "dangerus" with no one (500), so long as her reputation is safeguarded. All the ladies agree that she enjoys the best possible love-life.

Amour courtois seriously parodies the normal hierarchy of feudal social relationships. It also parodies the Church, especially its teachings in regard to man's undeserved love by God (caritas) in that it raises carnal love (cupiditas) to the level of worship, requiring a semi-sacred relationship between the lover and his beloved. If he is granted love it is in this same undeserved way. The lover asks the aid of and serves the all-powerful god of love, adoring love's embodiment in the person of his lady-saint like a pilgrim at a shrine. In her final speeches the Wedo makes specific reference to this feature of amour courtois. She begins her "taill" by asking her friends to listen to her "preching" (246-50), and concludes saying, "this is the legeand of my lif, though Latyne be it nane" (504): that is, she ironically creates a kind of secular "saint's life" of her personal marital history, presenting herself as an example, and finally inviting all men to sacrifice at the altar of her "lyre quhit" (499). I shall deal below more fully with the adverse theological implications of her bizarre preaching; for now, I simply note the comic roots of her declarations in the practices of fine amour. Her view of her own life, which at first appears so ridiculously grotesque, is actually natural to a devotee of amour courtois, a seriously held belief that serves to heighten the irony of an outside ethical viewpoint.

The language of amour courtois, like the Wedo's parodic use of "preching" and "legeand," contributes to the irony of the poem. I have pointed to ironic uses of "danger," "secrete," and "honour." Such standard terms as "courage" (67, 521), and "confort" (489) or "mercy" (315), euphemisms for sexual prowess and sexual consolation respectively, are also comic in the context of adulterous love. The Tretis is cast in the form of an alliterative romance, and the obvious con-

trast between idealized romance heroines and the vulgar reality before us further contributes to--even controls--the irony. For example, in sharp contrast to the vile insults the women ladle on their husbands, they call their illicit lovers "bernes" (60, 74) or "frekes" (210, 324), an old romance term for lover with the connotation of powerful warrior, worthy gallant. The narrator ironically calls the women themselves "wlonk" (36, 150) or "that semely" (146), archaic terms for "fair lady" (with their connotations of the ideal heroine), which Dunbar uses nowhere else in his poetry except satirically (as in "In Secreit Place," 2). The satire, of course, lies in the contrast between conventional romance heroines and the fair-featured but sharp-tongued and foul-hearted harpies tippling in the hawthorn bower. To get an idea of the comic distance between the ideal and "real" we need only compare the beautiful, chaste, passive, and obedient Emilye of Chaucer's Knight's Tale with Dunbar's ageing, deceitful, money-grubbing, hypocritical, adulterous, sadistic, wilful, and above all lecherous Wedo. The ironic division between outward appearance (16-36) and inward reality, the lawful and the coveted, and the rational and the emotional colours the ladies' every speech, desire, and deed.

One of Dunbar's favourite conventions, serious or comic, is that of the poet as dreamer reporting a nocturnal vision.¹⁵ Both Fasternis Evin in Hell and Ane Ballat of the Fen3eit Freir of Tungland belong to the tradition of satiric dream-visions, though this would be an incomplete estimate as both poems incorporate other conventions within the dream-vision context. The dream-vision is a very attractive comic

15. No fewer than ten poems, including the two under discussion, are dream-visions. Cf. Dunbar, Nos. 3, 10, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, and 81.

device. As a satirist, Dunbar could make effective use of the cover it provides. He could fantasize rudely, exaggerate facts with comic ferocity, and say the nastiest things about his subject, yet have the legitimate final retreat--"don't blame me, it's only a dream"--always available to him. But though only a dream, literary convention at least--as with Chanticleer's defence of dreams in Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale¹⁶--demands that the listener take the dream message in earnest, especially on a symbolic level. The dream-vision convention, while protecting the poet from charges of libel behind lightly veiled symbolism, is able to accommodate the most outrageous satiric barbs and yet can expect to be taken seriously, not dismissed as a product of pure fancy.

Dunbar makes full use of the dream-vision's conventional armour in The Fenszeit Freir, a scathing piece of character assassination aimed at ridiculing and discrediting a preferred courtier, the Italian alchemist John Damian. As the poem is based on an historical incident, it is relevant to quote a contemporary prose account of the events in Dunbar's poem:

September xxvii ambassadrie [the King] directis to France,
with the Archbischof of S. Androis, and the Erle of Arran.
Als to wryt, quhilk the peple 3it can not remember but
lauchter. Was at this tyme a certane Jtalian with the king,
of quhais mirrines and mowis be mekle delytet, and thairfor
maid him Abbot of Tungland. This Abbot was sa disceitful,
and had sa craftie and curious ingin to begyl, that he per-
suadet the king of his gret cunning in al thing natural,

16. Cf. Chaucer, B24312-4343. According to Macrobius' Commentary on the Dream of Scipio, trans. William H. Stahl, (New York: 1952), 87-90, there are five basic types of dream-vision: somnium, the standard, personally experienced dream; insomnium, dreams of day-time concerns; oraculum, predictions of the future, such as Chanticleer's; visio, a direct preview of things to come; and visum, or nightmare. Dunbar's comic dreams are all nightmares.

cheiflie in that politik arte, quhilk quha knawis tha cal him an alcumist; bot his intention only was to milk purses, quha knew nathing quhat he promiset, a lang tyme now past, the king and the lordes in hope to se sumthing commodious and preclair, was nathing. Quhen now this Abb saw him selfe hated be al man, to bring him agane into court, to obteyne the kings fauour, and a gude opinioun of the Nobilitie, he spredis a rumour throuch the cuntrie, and settis a day, quhen he wil flie throuch the air, from the Castel of Sterling, and be in ffrance afor the Ambassadouris. ffrom al partes mony gathiris to se that sycht. 3e the king amang the rest to recreat his mynd wald se gif he war sinceir. To be schort, the day cumis; to baith his schouders he couples his wings, that of dyuers foulis he had prouydet, fra the hicht of the castel of Sterling as he wald tak Jornay, he makis him to flie vp in the air; bot or he was weil begun, his veyage was at an end, for this deceiuer fel down with sik dade, that the bystanders wist not, quhither tha sulde mair meine his dolour, or meruel of his dafrie. Al rinis to visit him, tha ask the Abbot with his wings how he did. he answers that his thich bane is brokne, and he hopet neuer to gang agane; al war lyk to cleiue of lauchter, that quha lyk another Jcarus wald now flie to hevin, rychnow lyk another Simon Magus mycht nott sett his fute to the Erde. This notable Abbot, seing him self in sik derisioun, to purge his crime, and mak al cleine, the wyte he lays on the wings, that tha war not vttirlie egle fethiris bot sum cok and capoune fethiris sais he, war amang thame, nocht conuenient to that vse.¹⁷

We must credit Damian with the courage of his convictions, but his attempted flight to France became laughing-stock in Scotland for some time. As we can see from the Bishop Leslie's rather prejudiced account, Dunbar was hardly alone in finding the scientific Italian and his activities contemptuous. By contemporary reckoning Damian was considered a charlatan and unjustifiable drain on the public treasury who well deserved the poetic flaying administered to him by Dunbar. Bishop Leslie says that Damian was "hated be al man," but this is not quite so, for James IV, who was himself of decidedly scientific inclin-

17. Leslie's History of Scotland, ed. E.G. Cody and William Murison, 2 vols., STS 1st Ser. 5, 14, 19, 34, (Edinburgh & London: 1889-95), II, 124-25. Damian was obviously a capable liar, and was entertaining enough to remain in James IV's favour from 1505 until James's death in 1513.

ations, favoured him for over a decade despite such setbacks as a broken thigh and failure to find the Philosopher's Stone. The costs Damian incurred in his search for the quinta essencia were considerable, for he needed laboratory assistants, special vestments, and expensive materials, including suspiciously large quantities of "aqua vitae," or whiskey; and so on 12 March 1504/5 James created Damian Abbot of Tunland, "in order to endow him with an emolument and provide him with the necessary leisure for his alchemical experiments."¹⁸ Dunbar's hostile poem is obviously an attempt to dislodge Damian from royal favour.

The Fen3eit Freir, with its atmosphere of muckracking exposé, presents a strong element of personal grudge, giving the piece a heavier tone than many of Dunbar's other satires of folly in which "game" predominates. Moreover, involving as it does much of the bird kingdom and ranging over the known world from Scotland to Islam, the scope of the poem is much wider than most of his satiric forays; though, as usual, it is firmly rooted in events at court. There are several grounds on which Dunbar would be personally offended by Damian's preferment. First and foremost, evident from the "fen3eit" in the title and the poem's structure as a series of unmaskings, Dunbar regards Damian as a fraud and an expensive cheat, sentiments shared by others, as we have seen. Worse, Damian is a foreigner, accruing honours rightfully belonging to native Scots. By his foreign origins alone--with its mystique of the unknown and glamorous--he seems able to get away with more

18. John Read, "Alchemy Under James IV of Scotland," Ambix, 2 no. 2, (Sept. 1938), 60-67. Read feels that Dunbar celebrated Damian's aerial failure "with unnecessary gusto," considering the Italian "an enterprising and enlightened exponent of the experimental method in science" (pp. 64-66). Such a view does not take into account the human element of rivalry.

nonsense than any Scot could hope to achieve. Second, as a cleric Dunbar could be opposed on principle to "practical" science, especially the pseudo-magical dabblings in alchemy, as an offence against God and nature. Such experimentation pertains to diabolism. Moreover, Damian is a "false friar" in that he has obtained two benefices to enable him to continue his suspect practices, not because he is a qualified abbot or even notably religious, or even that he performs a useful service at court. This third element seems to rankle Dunbar most, that an obvious charlatan like Damian was given an unmerited benefice while he went without. His vitrolic abuse of Damian is, if stronger, consistent with Dunbar's satiric attacks on fellow courtiers who were his immediate rivals for royal preferment in his continual plea for a benefice. Compare, for example, the sentiments of such satiric poems as "Thir Ladyis fair that in the Court ar Kend" (No. 71), and any of the several benefice-begging complaints to the king, such as "To the King, quhone mony Benefices vakit" (No. 41) or "Ane Dreame" (No. 51). Obviously Dunbar was extremely vexed to find someone he considered a foreign cozener rewarded so quickly, while his long service as a courtier went unrewarded. Venting his full rage, scorn, and envy, he gave his grotesque imagination and sharp wits as free a rein as possible within the "dream" context.

The Fen3eit Freir skilfully mixes two conventions, as well as incorporating elements of the flyting technique. Within the fantastic and nightmarish context of his "swenyng swyth" (3), Dunbar broadly draws on the saint's life tradition by creating a parodic legend of an Antichrist.¹⁹ Damian, more than a mere human "fals freir," is depicted

19. In a second, serious, dream-vision satire on Damian's flight, a complaint on Fortune called "The Antechrist" (No. 53), the Italian

as a type of sinister yet ridiculous devil, a malevolent creature temporarily successful in a variety of disguises but who finally suffers humiliating exposure and ridiculous if seemingly painful defeat before the dream's raucous close.

We have already seen, in examining Sempill's The Bischof of St. Androis Lyfe, that an "anti-saint's legend" should be a didactic history of a religious villain, part biography, discrediting abuse, and moral lesson all in one connected narrative most often with an historical basis, intended to inspire in its readers ridicule and abhorrence for its subject. Dunbar's tale fits these criteria generally very well, demolishing Damian as a "fenzzeit freir" without mercy but with skill, gusto, and wild humour. Hagiographers were not concerned with historical accuracy but with "types" of religious heroes and the lesson to be conveyed. Dunbar, though he seems to base his poem in part on real facts and historical events, is likewise unconcerned with biographical accuracy--biography becomes a base from which to comically exaggerate--but with the discrediting message he intends. He creates a "type" of Antichrist, an arch-imposter and murderous scoundrel (serious charges which finally preclude a light tone) no longer recognizable as a human being. Throughout the legend Dunbar's stress is on Damian's outlawry from man and God, on the monstrous and the unnatural. In creating the "perfect" devil, the complete inversion of Christian beliefs and practices, he accuses him of the worst offenses against

is likened to "ane horreble grephoun" (26) who shall meet the She-dragon of Revelations and spawn the Antichrist, and put in the company of Mahoun and evil magicians such as Simon Magus (an archetype of the Antichrist) and Merlin. As Bishop Leslie noted, others jokingly likened Damian to Icarus and Simon Magus, so the notion is not original with Dunbar; but his association of Damian with the Antichrist is clear in both poems.

society and Heaven: theft, fraud, multiple homicide, hypocrisy, "magic" (alchemy), apostasy, and blasphemy.

Saint's legends in general are programmatic in nature: the story of the saint's birth and infancy; his miracles as an adult; sometimes hideous death, triumphant translation to Heaven, and posthumous miracles. The Fenzeit Freir of Tungland broadly follows this pattern, though less systematically and of course comically inverting holy principles to those by which Damian as an Antichrist operates. Dunbar begins by casting aspersions on Damian's origins, styling him a "sonis of Sathanis seid" (4) and a "Jow...of a grit engyne / And generit was of gyans" (31-33). Dunbar thereby associates him with hated Jewry and the antediluvian demon-giants of Genesis 6:4, images which effectively combine odiousness with the monstrous and the devilish.

This gives Damian comically damnable mythical origins, a larger-than-life basis of villainy. Yet Damian's early history reveals him to be outlawed and unacceptable even to Islam, font of infidel wickedness, and in this he exceeds the expectations of his satanic origins:

Me thocht a Turk of Tartary
Come throw the boundis of Barbary
And lay forloppin in Lumbardy
Full lang in waithman weid.

(5-8)

Lombardy, as Kinsley points out in his notes (Dunbar, p. 334), was renowned for its medical school. Damian may have studied there, or may have been born there (I do not think that "Lumbardy" is used merely to fill the rhyme). The town was also associated with banking and money-lending, and Dunbar may also be slyly suggesting the origins of Damian's greed. Damian's first acts on reaching Christian soil are to avoid baptism and to murder a "religious man" for his clothing (9-10), accounting for the facts known to the Scottish court, his Italian origins

and clerical appearance. Damian can then pursue his baleful and fraudulent career in a more respectable guise.

Dunbar's pace is fairly breathtaking, and he proceeds throughout to translate Damian's known history into a comic travesty of a pious life. Damian, described in the Treasury Accounts as "the French leiche" or "medicinar,"²⁰ is painted a criminal as Dunbar asserts he fled to France for fear of discovery and "To be a leiche he fenyt him thair" (17), becoming a poisonous apothecary who "murdreist mony in medecyne" (29-30). Coming to Scotland, he continues in this vein (33). There, despite his irreligiousness ("Unto no mess pressit this prelate," 49), "he come hame a new maid channoun" (53); and he fails in his alchemical experiments in extracting the "quintessance" (57-58). All of these damning episodes, absurd in themselves, are based on biographical fact, lending Dunbar's dream an aura of credibility. The humour is grotesque, centering as it does on horrible crimes and chicanery, taking its comic tone and rapid accumulation of atrocities recounted with breakneck speed in dancing rhythms uncoloured by authorial comment.

Dunbar glosses briefly over Damian's early abominations in order to focus on his latest and worst affront, his invasion of Heaven ("The hevin he nicht not bruke," 72) and subsequent downfall. As his career to this point may be seen in terms of the parodic version of a saint's life and miracles, so his flight and fall may be roughly equated with the third part of the saint's legend, the torture and physical destruction of the saint. The flight, again a real biographical episode ridiculous in itself ("bystanders wist not, quhither tha sulde mair

20. W.M. Mackenzie, op. cit., notes to the poem, p. 212.

meine his dolour, or meruel of his dafrie...al war lyk to cleiue of lauchter"), is, in keeping with Dunbar's grander vision and serious theological satire, exaggerated into an ultimate offence against nature. The birds, whose proper realm is the air, give instant and prolonged battle--and in the dream Damian comically remains suspended in the air for a considerable period, successful in flying until bereft of his wings--with the "monster thame amang" (110), an heroic effort to cleanse the skies. The birds are instinctive agents of good, able to recognize his sin and presumption and purge him from their realm. The satiric implication is that men, though endowed with reason, have failed to make any similar attempt. It is an implicit criticism of the policies of James IV.

Justly punished, Damian suffers grotesque torture and degradation (69-104)--buffets, blows, cuts from beak and claw, even emasculation (87)--before he finally strips off his wings and plummets into a face-deep mire to effect his escape (107). He is frightened but not in apparent pain (in accordance with his superhuman stature), and so can be viewed as completely ridiculous untainted by sympathy for physical suffering. Forced to cower as the avenging fowls patrol overhead, Damian ends his dream-career as an Antichrist by parodying Christ's death and three day entombment:

Had he reveild bene to the ruikis
 Thay had him revin all with thair cluikis.
 Three dayis in dub amang the dukis
 He did with dirt him hyde.
 The air was dirkit with the fowlis.
 (117-21)

Instead of regaining his spiritual homeland and gaining eternal life, if he were "reveild" he would face immediate dismemberment by the ravening fowls. Appropriately lodged in a mire, Damian, ultimately unsuccessful in his series of disguises and yet again the terrified outcast,

wallows in filth attended by angered black crows and ravens who darken the heavens in place of Christ's angels of light (114-15). Leaving Damian bemired, the poet-dreamer awakens before any possible resurrection. Damian is fallen literally and figuratively, comically dirtied outside as his spirit is inwardly.

Dunbar's other major satiric dream-vision, Fasternis Evin in Hell,²¹ is a two-part nightmare with supplementary apologia. Set on Fastern's Eve, the last night of carnival before the austerity of Lent begins, Dunbar pictures Hell as a mirror of earthly society. As the Christian court and city of Edinburgh enjoy a Shrove Tuesday celebration before entering the season of repentance, so too the inhabitants of Hell "mak thair observance" (9) in a fitting manner. There is a firmly didactic element involved in that their terrifying observances are of a nature calculated to spur live mortals on to genuine repentance lest they suffer likewise. Mahoun calls for "ane dance" ("The Dance," Pt. A, 1-102), a hideous allegorical parade of embodiments of the Seven Deadly Sins "dancing" and writhing in pain; "a heland padzane" (109-120) ridiculing the Gaelic-speaking denizens of Scotland's north country; and finally "a turnament" ("The Turnament," Pt. B, 121-228), satirizing a rivalry between incompetent tradesmen. The jousting cobbler and tailor are the only recognizable individuals in this dreamed-up hell, and Dunbar, in his "Amendis" (Pt. C), seems to apol-

21. Kinsley, Dunbar p. 335, accepts the argument for the unity of the material. Baxter, op. cit., 153-56, pointed out that the poems are linked in the Bannatyne and Maitland Folio MSS.; share the same complicated prosody; are both set in Hell and concerned with the damned; have the poet-dreamer lie "in till a trance" (3) from which he does not awaken until the final stanza of Pt. B ("I walk-nit of my trance," 223); and joins the two by the word "nixt" ("Nixt than a turnament wes tryid," 121). There can be no doubt that the poems are all of a piece.

ogise to these crafts for singling them out for mockery.

Dunbar, in short, includes the damned from all levels of Scottish society, whether courtier or craftsman, citizen or outlander (although women, curiously, are absent from the ranks of the damned in the poem, even in the dance of Lust). The poem progresses from general types to specific classes, from bizarre but serious allegory to more light-hearted slapstick buffoonery, bridged by a satiric swipe at "Erschmen" in a brief mockery of Highland culture. The macabre dance is a powerful and uncomfortably ironic mixture of horrible visual images with a tone of wild glee; it is grotesque in a more potent and serious manner than the scatological grotesqueries offered in the "Turnament." There is a steady lightening of tone as we move through the poem, a shift from the chilling laughter of fiends joking at their victims ("all the feyndis lewche and maid gekkis," 29)--laughter difficult for men to share in--to the final laughter of the poet-dreamer ("For lawchtir neir I brist," 222) at the mad but relatively harmless antics of the combative tradesmen, the superior laughter demanded of the human audience. The poem comically defuses itself, as though Dunbar were admitting that "The Dance" is too disturbing to stand on its own. "The Turnament" offers a kind of salving buffer against what has gone before, an emotional safety valve, the laughter of relief. The humour of the joust is traditional. But I think it is also aimed deliberately low, and I imagine the heartiness of laughter at the tradesmens' foolishness to be in direct proportion to the terror caused by "The Dance."

"The Dance" takes an executioners delight in gallows humour, inviting us to laugh at the damned in their torment. The comedy is largely visual, a series of grotesque cameos sketched with the speed of movement that reflects the rollicking rhythms of the dance itself. For

example,

Mony prowð trumpour with him trippit--
 Throw skaldand fyre ay as thay skippit
 Thay gyrnd with hiddous granis.
 (22-24)

The dancers are personified Sins, each with their retinue, appearing in order of magnitude. As Kinsley points out in his notes to the poem (pp. 336-39), the iconographic representations of the Sins are traditional, and the punishments they endure are symbolically appropriate. The avaricious are made to swallow molten gold and spew it out again (61-66), the wrathful are chained to one another and cut each other with knives (40-42), and so on. Strangely, Dunbar rails against the envious but does not specify their torment. Instead he laments, "Al-lace, that courtis of noble kings / Of thame can nevir be quyte" (53-54). The categories of sins are generally applicable to all levels of society. But suggestions like this one, the fact that the "gallands" are ordered to dance "garmountis...that last come out of France" (10-12), the dandified fashions of Pride ("the portrait of a gallant," Kinsley, p. 337), and the knightly armour and equipment of Ire all combine to indicate that Dunbar intended to mirror society at court with these allegorical portraits. His satiric message strikes closest to home first, for the poem begins with the noble classes and works its way down the social hierarchy. Courtiers laughing at these representations may be laughing at their future selves.

That listeners are invited to laugh at all strikes modern ears as disturbing. It seems improbable that men could truly join in the fiends' superior laughter over the damned, even in as brutal an age as Dunbar's where capital punishment was concerned. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that such punishment was, in theological terms, regarded

as just, as earned by and appropriate to the damned. Sympathy offered to the damned and any questioning of their treatment is tantamount to questioning God's judgment and authority, impossible presumption. One may identify with the sinners through a guilty conscience and so, feeling uncomfortable, not laugh. But one could not judge otherwise than to approve, and anyone with a clean conscience could in effect, signal his approval by laughing. As most men are imperfect, however, we should not expect to find many such laughers. Perhaps with the exception of saints, such a one would be a Hobbesian self-glorifier, and arguably guilty of pride.

Dunbar, oddly enough, comically seems to shrive his own conscience as an entertainer by assuring readers that "glemen thair wer haldin out" (104). I find the passage difficult to account for otherwise. The poet explains that only minstrels guilty of murder--a comic notion, as minstrels were proverbial cowards²²--would be rightfully admitted.

Mahoun's call for the Highland pageant breaks off from the horror of the dance rather abruptly, providing straightforward comedy in the form of intranational satire. Dunbar elsewhere voices his contempt for Highlanders, and no doubt he was not alone at court in despising Scotland's "barbaric" northern subjects and their Gaelic speech.²³ Irony remains the vehicle of humour: the tribes of Makfad3ane, as on earth, dwell "far northwart in an nuke"; but soon, called forth by a loud correnach, "Erschmen so gadderit him abowt / I hell grit rowme

22. Cf. the minstrel in the brawl of Christis Kirk of the Grene, in Bannatyne, II, 265, lines 122-25.

23. Cf. The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie, (No. 23), lines 145-68, in which Dunbar insults the "Ersche" Kennedy; also the sentiments of the unflattering poem "How the First Heland Man wes Maid of ane Horss Turd," in Bannatyne, III, 84.

they tuke" (110-114). The comic inference in exaggerating their numbers is that all Highlanders are automatically doomed to Hell. They seem to swarm in like loathsome insects. The comic suggestion is quickly sketched and subtly handled. Even in a terrible and horrific place like Hell the Highlanders, naturally damned, are unwelcome, and the poet disposes of them with dispatch:

Thae tarmegantis with tag and tatter
 Full lowd in Ersche begowth to clatter
 And rowp lyk revin and ruke.
 The Devill sa devit wes with thair 3ell
 That in the depest pot of hell
 He smorit thame with smuke.
 (115-20)

"Tarmegantis" is a term usually reserved for fiends, so the Highlanders are here made out to be natural human devils. Dunbar, taking the part of a kind of comic devil's advocate, takes a special offence at the "clatter" of Gaelic speech. He likens its sound to the cawing of crows and ravens, effectively combining raucous noise, black creatures of ill omen, and ravening birds of prey in one deft, insulting image. The Devil, himself tormented and unable to bear the riot, comically banishes them, exile from God and Satan alike. The passage remains uncomplicatedly funny, unlike the previous dance, because there is no hint that the Highlanders are involved in pain and hardship. On the contrary, they themselves are a painful nuisance to others. Dunbar, ironically imposing internal exile on the unpleasant Highlanders, doubly damns them even in Hell.

The poet-dreamer continues this ridiculing vein of humour, following the traditional lines of the peasant-brawl, in the "Turnament." Goliardic mockery of the merchant classes, "play," and grotesque eldritch fantasy replace irony as the main tone and method of the poem, though irony is not superseded altogether. Dunbar is unsparing of

brutal satire in the absurd hellish joust, but real malice--such as pervades The Fenzeit Freir--is conspicuously absent. The participants are abused "for fun," in accordance with comic convention,²⁴ and not, seemingly, for any potential edification but merely for the amusement of his auditors.

I have suggested that the Highland pageant and the tournament sections of the poem were intended as light relief from the dance. Entertainment, certainly of the crudest kind, seems to be the sole justification for the "Turnament." Divided off from the rest of the poem, this section may have been intended for public performance--perhaps even a reading with masque or dance accompaniment--as part of the pre-Lenten carnival festivities of 1507.²⁵ Such abandoned, energetic and irreverent poetry is perfectly in keeping with the Mardi Gras atmosphere leading to Lent's austere repentance. In the "Turnament" Dunbar seems to be maliciously picking on cobblers and tailors, but it is more likely he has moulded traditional and topical materials into a piece suitable for the court occasion. Further, I do not believe that

24. Dunbar is not reticent about satirizing anyone or any group. Elsewhere, for example "Renunce Thy God and Cum to Me" (No. 56) and especially "To the Merchants of Edinburgh" (No. 75), he satirizes the merchant classes generally. More specifically, there is evidence in Bannatyne, III, 22-25 ("The flytting betuix þe sowtar and the tail3or") and 37 ("The sowtar Inveyand aganis the tel3eor sayis"), or a long-standing comic feud between the two trades. Comically settling their quarrel for them, Dunbar does not take side but characteristically ridicules both. See also Kinsley, Notes, p. 340, on the unsuitability of the crafts for military pursuits.

25. Small, The Poems of William Dunbar, op. cit., III, 192-93, cites the Treasurer's Accounts which note payment by the court for dances and other entertainments during the carnival period preceding Lent. It is not too wild a surmise that the poem was intended as part of the "devilish" Shrove Tuesday activities, possibly parodying the serious pageants and tournaments of the preceding days.

Dunbar was compelled to make it up to them. His apology afterwards, "The Amendis," with its mocking exaggeration (5-7), absurd blame-putting on God for misshapen human beings (10, 14-15), and sabotaged final blessing ("In hevin ye salbe sanctis full cleir, / Thocht ye be knavis in this cuntre," 38-39; my italics), effectively retracts any serious intention to make amends. It fits their comic handling throughout the tournament, adding a final ironic, and so more sophisticated, insult.

I am unaware of another poem setting a comic tournament in Hell, nor any contemporary iconographic representation of such a theme; it seems to be a scurrilous stroke of genius, following logically on from the premise established in the allegorical dance. Yet Dunbar, afforded the wildest possible fantasies in the dream-vision context, is drawing on the contemporary (though possibly proverbial) cobbler-tailor rivalry, and more broadly on the goliardic tradition mocking the pretentious aspirations of the bourgeoisie, self-parodying aspirations to upper class customs. Such are also evident in a poem like The Tournament of Tottenham.²⁶ This poem and Dunbar's, though quite different in execution, are both concerned with buffoonish middle class characters resolving a dispute by means of a tournament, complete with colourful pageantry--a method and ceremony normally reserved for the gentry--and making a comic disaster of it in which all the participants are thoroughly degraded and physically abused.

Dunbar's humour, however, pushes to extremes not attempted in The Tournament of Tottenham, itself finally rather sympathetic in its char-

26. W.H. French and C.B. Hale, eds. Middle English Metrical Romances, 2 vols., (New York: 1930), II, 989-98. The poem is a combined peasant-brawl and mock-tournament in which will be decided into whose hand goes the fair if fickle miller's daughter.

acterizations. His basic premise lends itself to low-grade foolishness at best. The hellish setting is at this stage presided over by an absurd rather than terrifying Mahoun, who, though lording over the affair, takes part in the action at the fool's level. This irony of contrasts works in both directions; for as the Devil is lowered in dignity, so are the sowtar and teljour elevated above their normal stations, to that of contending knights ("Mahoun come furth and maid him knycht," 142, 171). Sustaining this premise, the sowtar and teljour are conveyed to the field of honour by their several rascally supporters as if by their seconds and pages ("a graceles garisoun," 132; and "full mony lowsy harlott," 161, respectively). Their banners and trappings, further parodying a legitimate tournament, comically bear devices associated with their professions (e.g. the sowtar's "baner wes of barkit hyd / Quhairin Sanct Girnega did glyd," 163-64; cf. lines 1-3-37). In ironic contrast to their appearances, the sowtar and teljour conduct themselves in ways unbefitting them as knights: as the poet drily comments when the fearful tailor regurgitates on the Devil, "Thus knychtly he him quitt" (180).

Like the Highlanders, the two jousters are comically damned twice over: first because they are prominent citizens of Hell and liegemen of the Devil; and second, because they are comic failures at the joust, dishonourably revealing their incompetence as combatants and their natural unsuitability to their new roles. The honour of being promoted to knighthoods in Hell is a comically dubious one. But, ironically, the inept and timorous pair prove to be unworthy of noble status even in Hell. The Devil, realizing that he has made a gross mistake, breaks the tradesmen back down in rank to their rascally former stations, low places, which, ironically, they prefer:

The Devill gart thame to dungeoun dryve
 And thame of knychtheid cold de pryve,
 Dischairgeing thame of weir;
 And maid thame harlottis bayth for evir--
 Quhilk still to keip thay had fer levir
 Nor ony armes beir.

(211-16)

Even as the damned in their native realm they are comic failures.²⁷

In such battles between ignoble parties, and this occurs in The Tournament of Tottenham and peasant-brawl poems such as Peblis to the Play as well, cowardice is the prevailing characteristic of the contestants. Dunbar makes full use of the traditional fear-motif, appropriate to the non-courtly characters, introducing scatological details of the basest animal kind as the sustaining vehicle of humour: unable to control themselves, the timorous "knights" fart excessively (155), sweat profusely (168), vomit on the Devil (178-80), and soil themselves (191); and the triumphant sowtar is knocked down by a superhuman blast of dirt and wind from the vengeful Devil's fundament (203-208).²⁸

27. Tom Scott, op. cit., 236-37, suggests that Dunbar is laughing at real knightly contests through the persons of his inept craftsmen; and that he is making a "class judgment." I do not deny there is a parodic element regarding the romantic rituals attending chivalric tournaments. Yet the poem is not necessarily a sly insulting judgment of the beliefs and practices of the nobility--a class to which Dunbar could lay a fair claim as his own. Dunbar has already assaulted the courtiers in "The Dance," and there is nothing to suggest that a joust qua joust was absurd. We note that the "harlottis," the knavish tradesmen, fail at the business of knights, and are punished and degraded in status. They are not successful or rewarded for their presumption, and the class barrier is upheld, tacitly approved.

28. A striking number of components in the "Turnament" find parallels in the anonymous "Flytting betuix þe sowtar and the tail3or," in Bannatyne, III, 22-25. Compare Dunbar's "tel3ouris will nevir be trew" (138) with the "Flytting" line 9 (p. 23); his "rak of fartis" (155) with line 38 (p. 25); "Sanct Girnega did glyd" (164) with lines 5 (p. 22), 17 and 24 (p. 23), and 48 (p. 25); the spewing "agane ane quart of blek" (179) with lines 19 (p. 23) and 26 (p. 25); "the uly birstit out" (168) with lines 10 and 14 (p. 22), and 14-15 (p. 24); and Dunbar's "harlottis" being cast in the dungeon of Hell (211-15) with similar predictions in the "Flytting," lines 52-54 (p. 25). The parallels are quite remarkable and seem beyond

Dunbar continues the "Turnament" section at as quick a pace as "The Dance," maintaining a swift sequence of comic scenes. But it is also worth noting that the poem's form is itself traditional for knightly satire, or at least has a notable precedent in the service of romance parody, for Dunbar has chosen the same metrics and rhyme-scheme as Chaucer's Sir Thopas.

In the "Tway Cumberis" and The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo Dunbar relies in large measure on the conventions of medieval anti-feminist literature for comic force. Dunbar, a priest by vocation, exhibits in these and other poems the predominant clerical attitude--tending toward firm misogyny--toward womankind. His exceptions are, of course, his patronesses Queen Margaret and the Blessed Virgin Mary, special classes of women. Mariolatry mitigated somewhat against the effects of clerical anti-feminism in the medieval period, but the profoundly unique grace of the Blessed Virgin generally did not extend to all women, and cleric-inspired misogynistic attitudes prevailed.²⁹ The celibate ideal, hallowed by the Church Patriarchs beginning with St. Paul, was fostered by monasticism. Because of the Christian stress on asceticism "there came into being as an inevitable consequence a conception of woman as the supreme temptress, 'ianua diaboli,' the most dangerous of all obstacles in the way of salvation."³⁰ A loving spirit was certainly better than a non-loving one,

accident, but unfortunately we cannot tell whether one poem influenced the other or whether both drew on common materials from an unknown source. The "Flytting" cannot be reliably dated.

29. Margaret A. Gist, Love and War in the Middle Ages, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: 1947), 25, points out that Mariolatry "exalted one woman rather than womankind," and had "little influence on man's treatment of the women in his daily life."

30. Eileen Powers, "The Position of Women," in The Legacy of the Middle Ages, ed. C.G. Crump and E.F. Jacobs, (Oxford: 1933), 402-403.

but the love of God for man was to be reciprocated and far outweighed any earthly love, especially physical passion. Any goal short of or any distraction from caritas, the love of God, was considered by the Church to be self-destructive. Sex came to be associated with the death of the soul, and so men were exhorted by the clergy to "flee women as lepers."³¹ Understandably, most people could not abide the rigours of virginity, and for those concupiscently inclined there existed the honourable but poor compromise of marriage, a troubled and difficult state. The Church taught that women, the weaker vessels, were naturally inferior and evil; and since this opinion was regarded as fact, women had to be kept subordinate. Obedience (like patient Griselda's) was therefore woman's chief virtue, and contrariness and wilfulness her chief errors.³² The four main vices of women were foolishness, quarrelling and gossiping, a propensity for insubordination and personal freedom (instabilitas loci), and a love of finery.³³ Typically, an ignoble woman would be depicted in sermons as a gaudily attired street-roamer given to garrulity and gossiping. Such women were the sisters of Eve; and men, such as the Wedo's "buthman," who failed to govern their wives were liable, like Adam, to be brought to ruin.³⁴ Not surprisingly, high-spirited and intelligent women rebelled. For

31. G.R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, (Oxford: 1933), 382-84.

32. Ibid., 389.

33. Ibid., 377-91. Chaucer's Alyce of Bath provides an immediate and comprehensive example of these faults. In her case as well as that of the "tway cummeris," gossiping and Lent seem to go together.

34. Ibid., 375. On medieval English anti-feminist literature in general see the catalogue in Francis Utley, The Crooked Rib, (Columbus, Ohio: 1944), passim; and John Peter, Satire and Complaint in Early English Literature, (Oxford: 1956), 86ff.

Marie of France and hundreds of her ilk, whether serious or comic figures, this rebellion took the form of promoting the code of amour courtois, a theologically perilous code celebrating cupiditas and exalting women.

These are the conditions and traits of the men and women of the "Tway Cummeris" and especially the Tretis. The gossips are ungoverned in their appetitive wills, either by a sense of personal wrong-doing or by external authority, and they comically bring down both themselves and their negligent husbands. Indeed "a minor comic masterpiece,"³⁵ the short, apparently effortless "Tway Cummeris" embodies many of the traditional complaints about women. In lamenting to each other their hard lot, the gossips damn themselves unconsciously--and so comically, when compared against normal moral standards--with admissions of sloth (6-10), gluttony at drink (2), wrath (19), lust, in regarding their husbands as useless bed partners (23), and, of course, in the context of Lent, utter religious hypocrisy (29-30), all set in a framework of idle gossiping.³⁶ Considering the full moral implications, the satire is very heavy indeed. But Dunbar's handling of his material--the bouncing tetrameter quatrains with absurd, ironic refrain "This lang Lentern makis me lene," his characters' unabashed and unadulterated folly in comfort-seeking, and lack of direct editorial commentary--manages to convey a lighthearted tone.

The "Tway Cummeris," in the use of comic anti-feminist convention,

35. Tom Scott, op. cit., 65.

36. Owst, op. cit., notes that gossiping had the worst possible theological implications: Eve supposedly gossiped at length with the serpent in Eden, and her talking revealed to the fiend her instability and suggested to him a way of working confusion on man.

is the Tretis in miniature. These sisters in sin gossip and confess their failings freely, drink to excess, suggest their husbands are sexually inadequate, flout social and moral conventions, and in general exhibit a wilful contrariness, comically seeking "natural" creature pleasures at their spiritual peril. Women, in the clerical view, were regarded at best as some sort of poisonous sweet, sensually delightful but deadly to the soul.³⁷ Their religion of love and theories of household "maistrie" were clear parodies of accepted Church morality. In satirizing the two wives and Wedo Dunbar takes just this traditional approach. The ironic contrast of the beginning of the Tretis, playing the beauty of the scene off against the inward corruption of the ladies, has been frequently noted.³⁸ But further, the poem's setting, emphasizing at length the delight of the senses--smell ("the savour sanative of the sueit flouris," 8), touch ("The dew donkit the daill," 10), taste ("cowpis...full of ryche wynis," 35), sound (the bird's "sugarit sound of hir sang glaid," 7), and everywhere colourful sight ("nature full nobillie annamalit with flouris / Off alkin hewis under hevin," 31-32)--dwells on the element of sensual temptation. The remainder of the satire then totally demolishes that temptation with the ugly and ridiculous reality beneath the fair appearance. The transitory earthly paradise proves exceedingly fleet in the poem.

An hilariously bawdy anti-feminist satire, the Tretis weaves together several traditional genres into a complex new whole. It is a variety of the long-standing chanson de mal mariée. The conventions

37. Owst, op. cit., 392ff.

38. T.F. Henderson, Scottish Vernacular Literature, 3rd ed., (Edinburgh: 1910), 168; James Kinsley, ed. Scottish Poetry, A Critical Survey, (London: 1955), 31; and A.K. Moore, "The Setting of The Tua Mariit Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," English Studies, 32 (1951), 56-62.

of this genre include the satiric purpose and cynical attitude of the poet, the festival season and setting typical of a chanson d'aventure narrative introduction,³⁹ the poet's overhearing en cachette the women's confidential and therefore comically frank confessions, the usual wifely invective along the lines of Cato's truism that "crabbed age and youth cannot live together peaceably," the women's desire for a more suitable lover, and the main theme: "the final triumph of beauty and youth sacrificed to social convenience; passion's independence of the marriage tie, and derision of the husband. The woman, in these compositions, pours out all her scorn and hate against her husband and receives more or less favourably the proposals of a gallant who encounters her."⁴⁰ In these features, and in anti-feminist convention, Dunbar is quite traditional. Further, as we have seen already, he employs and parodies the conventions and language of amour courtois.

Familiar with and expert in handling the general conventions, there is also evidence that Dunbar was specifically familiar with Lydgate⁴¹ and especially Chaucerian works: hints of the Wife of Bath--gossiping,

39. A.K. Moore, op. cit., 56-62, notes that Midsummer's Eve, June 23rd, was St. John's Eve, according to long folk custom "an occasion traditionally devoted to unrestrained merry-making"; and that the women, against this suitable background, behave according to a traditional pattern--feasting, drinking, talking, slipping the watch of their guardians, dancing until dawn--that realistically agrees with the literary conventions invoked. Given the poem's initial line, there is some question, then, whether Dunbar's audience would have been much surprised or shocked by the ladies' dialogue that followed, suggesting that Dunbar simply used the elaborate and lush setting to ironically juxtapose appearance versus reality.

40. Janet M. Smith, op. cit., 37. Pages 36-41 provide the reader with the general characteristics of the chanson de mal mariée. Cf. also Helen E. Sandison, The "Chanson D'Aventure" in Middle English, (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: 1913); and Catherine Singh, "The Alliterative Ancestry of Dunbar's 'Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo'," Leeds Studies in English, New Series VII (1974), 22-54.

41. See R.D.S. Jack, "Dunbar and Lydgate," SSL, 8 no. 4 (April 1971), 215-27, esp. pp. 220-23.

husband-"gouvernance" (259), sexual aloofness in the marriage bed (132) and "selling" the connubial debitum (144), contentiousness (329), fondness for proverb (263), a proclivity for instabilitas loci (70-71)-- are scattered throughout the poem; the first wife's comic description (107-108) of being scraped painfully by her husband's bristly beard recalls May's wedding night in The Merchant's Tale (Chaucer, El821-27); and, as Priscilla Bawcutt notes,⁴² the second wife's absurd description (186-88) of her impotent husband in terms of a dog lifting his leg to all bushes, though he has no intention of urinating, is culled from The Parson's Tale (Chaucer, I856-57). Dunbar makes judicious use of all of the comic possibilities these traditions and sources afford in one compact, energetic, brilliantly exaggerated and summary poem. He manages, despite reliance on convention, to infuse the poem with vitality and originality.

The Tretis exhibits a conventional representation of the female psyche through the ladies' confessions, that of their sexuality. It is a two-pronged comic leitmotif. They complain that they need to be free to choose new partners frequently because men wear out too quickly; this supports their comic peevishness in rejecting their spouses. Yet, on the other hand, the wives insist that they are weary of their husbands' persistent bedroom attentions. Both married women ironically find themselves in the position of complaining of their husbands for being unwelcomely amorous⁴³ and for being useless lovers, "waistit and worn fra Venus werkis" (127-36). Their incongruous sit-

42. Priscilla Bawcutt, "Dunbar's 'Tretis of the Tua Mariit Women and the Wedo' 185-187 and Chaucer's 'Parson's Tale'," Notes and Queries, 209 (Sept. 1964), 332-33.

43. The women defend themselves by feigning illness (224) or by bargaining for gifts (137-40).

uation, seemingly illustrative of female perversity of the will, is conventional in anti-feminist literature, and may be easily paralleled in *Alyce of Bath*.

Yet it is a convention supported by medieval scientific opinion about women's physical needs. Medieval man generally ascribed to the Ovidian notion that if a woman is chaste it is from lack of opportunity.⁴⁴ This belief had the weight of medical authority to back it up.⁴⁵ Not only did medical science from Aristotle onward "prove" the superiority of the male, it firmly asserted that sexual intercourse was necessary to maintain a woman's well-being: that is, women needed sexual activity in order to remain healthy. The reasoning was that women had to be kept moist, "and one way that a mature woman could be kept moist was through sexual intercourse. If they were deprived of sexual intercourse their uterus would dry up and lose weight and in its search for moisture it would rise up towards the hypochondrium, thus impeding the flow of breath."⁴⁶ If this condition persisted, greater and more painful ailments would ensue. Conversely, excessive sexual activity in the male tended to deplete him and render him impotent.⁴⁷ Easily exhausted, men were urged to moderate intercourse.

Clearly, both principles are comically operative in the *Tretis*. Given a free choice, the women opt for absolute promiscuity ("To change and ay to cheise agane--than, chastitie, adew!" 208), seeking bliss in

44. Gist, op. cit., 25.

45. Vern L. Bullough, "Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women," a valuable paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Medieval Academy of America, the University of California, Los Angeles, 15 April 1972. To my knowledge the paper is as yet unpublished; I refer to the typescript.

46. Bullough, *ibid.*, 9.

47. *Ibid.*, 13.

as many sexual partners as they could acquire. As for their men, great age or the overuse of one's "instrument" resulted in impotency:

"He is a 3oung man ryght 3aip, bot nought in 3outh flouris,
For he is fadit full far and feblit of strenth.
He wes as flurising fresche within this few 3eris,
Bot he is fal3eid full far and ful3eid in labour.
He has bene lychour so lang quhill lost is his natur,
His lume is waxit larbar and lyis in to swoune."

(170-75)

Though young, he has spent "his natur" through lechery. The angry first wife also recognizes the female ability to "use up," exhaust and lay waste, male potency through sexual hyperactivity:

"And quhen I gottin had ane grome, ganest of uthir,
3aip and 3ing, in the 3ok of ane 3eir for to draw,
Fra I had previt his pitht the first plesand moneth
Than suld I cast me to keik in kirk and in markat
And all the cuntre about kyngis court and uthir,
Quhair I ane galland nicht get aganis the nixt 3eir,
For to perfurneis furth the werk quhen fail3eit the tother."

(78-84)

Fully expecting to destroy a lover's usefulness, she must keep a wary eye out for a suitable, and routine, replacement. We notice further her choice of the word mystirs, that is, "needs," regarding her sexuality: in sneering at her husband's bedroom prowess she claims that he is not "worth a bene in bed of my mystirs" (128). Also in the "Tway Cummeris," the proverbial phrase "not worth a bean in bed," incidentally, is also used by Chaucer (May's thoughts on January's love-making, Chaucer El854).

The reader cannot help but notice that sexual dissatisfaction is the chief complaint of the women in the Tretis. The ladies are married to sexually spent males, and the Wedo alone, with her fully formulated philosophy of happiness and her entourage of "all my luffaris lele" (476-96), seems to have the problem solved. The first wife, with the second wife's later concurrence, declares that the institution of marriage is unnatural, and, citing the familiar St. Valentine's Day

legend, further declares that birds have a better connubial arrangement than human beings:

"It is agane the law of luf, of kynd and of nature,
Togiddir hartis to strenne that stryveis with uther:
Birdis hes ane better law na bernis be meikill,
That ilk 3eir, with new joy, joyis ane maik."

(58-61)

When she cites the "law of luf" (mistakenly confusing it with the laws of nature) she is of course referring to the laws of Eros, and not the laws of caritas. She fancies a world of serial polygamy (75), and in this desire has the others' approval.

Dunbar's audience would have recognized the extremely funny error of these ladies in calling on "natural law." It was natural in the clerical and social view of women, considered inferiors, to suffer the subjugation of their lords. Looking to the lower animal orders in the cosmic hierarchy for a model of behaviour is, logically speaking, absurd and perilous nonsense, indicating unbridled appetitive will. Recall that the Merle, representing sensuality in The Merle and the Nychtingall (No. 16), had invoked this same "natural law" against the dictates of the Nightingale:

"Fy, ypocreit, in 3eiris tendirnes
Agane the law of kynd thow gois expres
That crukit aige makis on with 3ewth serene."

(36-38)

To the learned Nightingale this is simple folly: "In thy song gud sentens is thair none" (30). Sensual love only blinds one to the love of God (74-80); and, after sound persuasion, the Merle finally sees reason: "Myn errour I confes-- / This frustir luve all is bot vanite" (97-98). Even the birds know better than to cite irrational "natural law" as opposed to the laws of God and the dictates of reason regarding love.

ii. Characterization

Dunbar depends to some extent on real life ("Ane Blak Moir," "Of James Doig," etc.) but primarily on literary convention in the depiction of his characters. In his serious poems he often relies on abstractions like "dame Flora the quene" (The Goldyn Targe, 42) with set emblematic traits, or "types" of established personages like Venus or the Blessed Virgin. In his humorous mimetic transcripts he creates comic caricatures drawn from traditional elements. Caricatures, of course, have proved to be the very stuff of humorous literature throughout the ages. The unnamed Wedo, and to a lesser extent the two wives, of the Tretis are the closest Dunbar comes to portraying rounded personalities in his whole canon. Yet even here they are so single-minded as to preclude consideration as real, believably-motivated characters. They are types of bad wives, plain descendents of La Vielle from Le Roman de la Rose, Alyce of Bath (herself a derivative composite), and the anti-feminist literary tradition at large. But though caricatures, all of the women--unlike the indistinguishable gossips of the "Tway Cummeris"--have distinct personalities.

The first wife is a vigorous and thoroughgoing termagant, direct and undisguised; it is she who most resembles the Wife of Bath in one of her early marriages. She is vain and proud of her beauty (73-74); "dangerus" with her husband (132) and disdainful of his Venusian efforts (127-28), selling him his marital rights (131-44); and an energetic scold. Her most outstanding feature is her "flyting" tongue. Her unrelieved, loveless raillery against her aged husband has prompted Tom Scott to point out that the victim of the tirade is less harmed

by the abuse than the scolder.⁴⁸ With this revelation she forfeits any sympathy she may have elicited from the oppressiveness of her marital situation. She is a comic virago, like her companions possessed of none of Alyce of Bath's wit, self-awareness, or redeeming good humour. She, and to a much smaller degree the second wife, tries to inflict verbal injuries on her husband as a vent to relieve her rage and frustration at her situation; and it finally proves an impotent gesture. The Wedo, in sharp contrast, is free of marriage and in command of her life, and does not require the comfort afforded in a flyting.

Whereas open sexual warfare characterizes the first wife, caution and hypocrisy are the traits dominant in the second wife, though both are much alike in their desires, their complaints, and their disgust with the feudal marriage-system which denies them any choice in matrimonial partners. Their complaints dovetail; they represent two sides of the same issue, the unhappiness of being married to sexually spent males, an old one and a young one, respectively. Before the second wife consents to reveal her innermost thoughts to her companions, characteristically she first secures their promise to protect her secret (158-59). This is a comic device Dunbar uses to intrigue his audience and ensure our belief in the truth of what will be exposed ("ther is no spy neir. / I sall a ragment reveil fra rute of my hert," 161-62). Ironically, she will make reference to this same anatomical feature when she turns away her husband at night: "handill me nought sair; / A hache is happinit hastely at my hert rut" (223-24). After her prefatory words, we are in no doubt as to the nature of her "heart troubles." The second wife is primarily annoyed by the gnawing feeling

48. Tom Scott, op. cit., 185.

that she has been tricked: a woman marrying an old man knows what to expect ("Scho that has ane auld man nought all is begylit," 199); but she married a young debauchee who turned out to be no better abed than the first wife's "auld carybald." She is distressed that her young lord is all show and no substance, falsely advertising non-existent wares, a dog who lifts his leg to all bushes out of habit rather than need: "I wend I josit a game and I haif geit gottin; / He had the glemyng of gold and wes bot glase fundin" (201-202). But though she seethes with libidinal resentment, she does not have the boldness of her compatriots. She may dream of a "seemlier" lover (217-18), but there is no evidence that she has resorted to the sexual outlet afforded in adultery. Unlike the first wife, she is hypocritical in her relations with her husband, feigning love-looks (227-30), empty mouthing "sueit wordis" (226), and shamming illness to avoid her husband's affections (220-25). Further, there is a second level of irony in her hypocrisy: as he is a "show" husband, she is a "show" wife, matching his false potency with a pretence of loving fidelity. They are, comically, made for each other.

The Wedo, "amoral" by nature and immoral in fact,⁴⁹ is like something out of St. Jerome's worst nightmares. She combines and magnifies the worst features of both the other women. The mock-invocation beginning her recollections ("I shaw 3ow sisteris in schrift I wes a schrew evir," 247-51) ironically addresses God, much as a priest would invoke His support at holy services: "God my spreit now inspir and my speche quyckin / And send me sentence to say substantious and noble" (247-48). As she is an advocate of cupiditas, her invocation is wholly

49. For a discussion of the Wedo's "amoral" nature, see Tom Scott, *op. cit.*, 190.

inappropriate. She may mean the god of love, but whatever the intent of her earnest jesting, such a prayer is most likely to be heard and answered by the god of Hell, Satan. The Wedo preaches a sermon on shrewery and deceit, drawing on the experiences of her two "successful" marriages, revealing how to "Be dragonis baith and dowis ay in double forme" (263). Her second husband, the "buthman" as she contemptuously refers to him, was born of the ranks of the merchant class, and undoubtedly suffered the worst treatment at her "unmerciablie" hands. She browbeat and degraded him, denied him his conjugal rights (359-64), cuckolded him (380), disinherited his children in preference for her own (402-403), cast out his friends and relations (405-407), castrated him in nearly every sense of the word,⁵⁰ and shed not a solitary real tear--she discreetly squeezed a sponge for appearance's sake (437-40), outrageous comic audacity--at his death, declaring instead "wel is me for evir" (415). She is cruel and vicious, concerned only for her betterment and her reputation ("I wald haif ridden him to Rome with a raip at his heid / Wer not ruffill of my renoune and rumour of pepill," 331-32). She delights in hypocrisy,⁵¹ feigning the sorrows of widow-

50. Bullough, op. cit., 16, notes that "Avicenna, for example, asserted that a hen, after having fought with and conquered a rooster, would be so proudly convinced of her equality to the vanquished male that she would grow spurs. The implication was obvious; if a man let a woman move toward any degree of equality she would soon be challenging him for control." This very image is used by Dunbar, applied to the Wedo: "I crew abone that craudone, as cok that wer victour, / Quhen I him saw subject and sett at my bydding" (327-327). It is interesting to note also that Chaucer, describing the Wife of Bath in the General Prologue, adds this small detail to her portrait: "And on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe" (Chaucer, A473). It is a fine point, but I think it is significant.

51. The Wedo is an inversion of the virtues, a parody of a Christian woman. For the theologically correct approach to widowhood, compare the sermon cited by Owst, op. cit., 119.

hood with great show, secretly living a merry and lecherous life, a life of which she alone has the governance. She concludes her portrayal of perfect womanly happiness with a vision of herself as the centre of lustful attraction surrounded by near an army of desirable bachelors, confessing, like the Wife of Bath (Chaucer, D618-19), that she is unable to deny any good fellow:

"And gif his lust be so lent in to my lyre quhit
That he be lost of with me lig, his lif sall not danger."
(499-500)

She is so "merciful" that no man need fear dying for lack of love. She has become a saint of Eros,⁵² and indeed she uses just that word in describing the success of her hypocritical guile: "I wes dissymb-
lit suttelly in sanctis liknes" (254). She has in a lively and thoroughgoing way pursued her single goal. But, like all saints, she is an absolute figure; and like all personal absolutes, she cannot be accounted a full human soul. We learn a great deal of her mind and history, but the Wedo is still a caricature.

In Dunbar's other humorous mimetic transcripts as well he draws commonly on ready-made character types, modifying them or not as it suited his purposes. The fox, lamb, and wolf in "The Wowing of the King" are characters lifted directly from the Aesopic and especially Reynardian fable traditions, familiar figures in Henryson's Morall Fabillis. Though the sexual interest is an unusual twist, they follow the usual pattern of gulling one another; Dunbar, however, has comically reversed the fox and lamb's intellectual roles, giving the woman, as is proper in amour courtois, command of the situation. A woman hiding her lover from her suspicious husband or guardian--a stan-

52. Tom Scott, op. cit., 201.

dard feature of the fabliau--is also incorporated into the poem. Unlike Henryson's animals, who operate in both the literal animal world and as symbolic representations, the light symbolic guise of Dunbar's actors must be easily pierced or the full comedy fails; that is, the fox, lamb, and wolf must be recognized as humans in disguise--specific humans at that--for maximum comic effect.

Father Damian, in The Feneit Freir, is perverted biography, shaped by Dunbar into a double portrait of an imperfect charlatan and devilish flying Antichrist patterned on Simon Magus and apocalyptic legends. The only character types of Fasternis Evin in Hell appear in the "Tournament," the sowtar, tel3our, and the Devil. Craven fools, the cobbler and tailor are stock figures of fun in the merchant classes, cowardice and incompetent rivalry their dominant traits; and the buffoonish Mahoun, a slapstick jokester inspiring not terror but laughter, is a type of comic devil-figure, like Titivillus, commonly found in mystery and morality plays.⁵³ The flat, half-dimensional amour courtois lovers of "In Secreit Place" are simple comic parodies emptily mouthing romantic conventions, depicted repeatedly in the imagery as a giant suckling babe and his milky mother (cf. lines 23-25, 36-37, 53-54). These lovers, the gossips of the "Tway Cummeris," and the cobbler and tailor vie with each other as being the least individualized caricatures of all.

The poet as mimetic witness is also true to comic convention. He either safely "dreams up" character defamation--as in Fasternis Evin

53. Titivillus, a sort of prankster-devil whose job it is to gather in damned souls, is found in both the morality play Mankind and in the Towneley mystery play The Judgement. See F.J. Furnivall and Alfred W. Pollard, eds. The Macro Plays, EETS E.S. 91, (London: 1904), 18-22; and George England and Alfred W. Pollard, eds. The Towneley Plays, EETS E.S. 71, (London: 1897), 373-87.

in Hell and The Fenzzeit Freir--or relies on another favourite, protective ploy from chanson d'aventure, overhearing from a place of concealment a dialogue which he then faithfully reports. This eavesdropping device is used directly in the Tretis, "In Secreit Place," and "The Wowing of the King," and it is implied in the "Tway Cummeris." The poet is a detached observer, close by but removed from the events he witnesses. Literally an outsider, he is also on another level than the actions observed, sensitive to ironies and listening from a morally superior vantage. His chief aim is to appear in collusion with a knowing audience--even when he suddenly and ironically reverses this relationship of confidentiality in the Tretis by posing his final question. That is, he wishes to say, with Puckish distance but unfortunately without Puck's good-humoured humanity, "Lord, what fools these mortals be." He may or may not (usually not) insult or comment upon the characters in his satires, preferring to let them condemn themselves through foolish word or deed; but he is almost invariably looking down on them. He completely excludes any sympathetic elements or redeeming features in their natures when ridiculing them. This makes audience identification with the agents impossible; and so doing also makes it impossible for an audience to side against the poet despite the frequently ugly and inhumane streaks--jealousy, envy, malice, attacking the defenceless--in his character.

From these observations on the agents in Dunbar's poetry we might extrapolate a proposition: caricatures are commonly found in satires because caricatures are better suited to ridiculing satire than are more fully realized characters. Such a statement, of course, is not absolute and cannot stand without qualification. In different satires obviously there are degrees of ridicule and sympathy, as satires may

have a variety of intentions; and occasionally the author and audience are at variance regarding these degrees, as when an audience feels a sympathy for the subject not shared by the poet, or vice versa. There are occasions when the object of ridicule and the subject of satire are not equivalent: for example, the object of ridicule in The Fenzzeit Freir is Damian, but the subject of the satire is "off stage," as it were, implicit criticism of James IV for failure to recognize a montebank; or, on a more complex level, in the Tretis the husbands are the object of the womens' ridicule, while the objects of ridicule in the poem are the women themselves, and the subject of satire is the failure of men to govern their wives properly, a subject brought to the fore in the poet's final question to the bachelors in his audience. Further, some satires animate more fully developed characters than others, such as the fox in Henryson's The Fox and the Wolf, where the fox, the main object of satire, displays a distinct personality through beliefs, speech, feelings, and mental processes like wants, decisions, adjustments to changing situations, and making choices. Both Dunbar's Abbot Damian (or Wedo) and Henryson's fox are deceitful, foolish rascals who spiritually prove to be their own worst enemies. But the fox is a likeable rogue, unlike Damian (or the Wedo): he is likeable because he is a character, a rounded personality, with strengths, weaknesses, and traits we can identify and identify with; he is sympathetic and mentally alert, whereas Damian is a caricature, a mechanical or puppet-like collection of fixed qualities, wholly and deliberately presented as unsympathetic. Consider, for example, Damian's motivation: we have to infer the reasons for the choice of action he takes, for we never see into his mind and heart. Henryson's satires are serious, aimed generally at and intended to correct society

for the most part, sometimes humorous and sometimes sober in tone. Dunbar's satires, aiming to discredit some particular individual or individuals without sympathy, are invariably ridiculing satires, sometimes playful and sometimes vituperative in tone. The type of agents in a poem, character or caricature, helps to determine the type of narrative it is, story or mimetic transcript. One of the chief points of contrast between these branches of narrative is that mimetic transcripts rarely have fully developed characters and so no real social interplay (though I am not alternatively suggesting that all stories have fully developed characters); mimetic transcripts usually animate characters of convenience, arising from the demands of the theme. Peripeteia depends on choices made and actions taken by a narrative's agents: characters, with recognizable feeling-states and decision-influencing personalities, take actions which are determined by their choices; caricatures seem unable to choose, for they lack a developed mind for us to engage and so we do not see the decision-making processes of a personality but rather acts committed according to fixed patterns of behaviour and pre-determined choices. Caricatures are not seen as choosing to act but responding to any given situation within very limited parameters. This, of course, often answers well the demands of comic behaviour, the fixed state in collision with desired fluidity. Plot, as I have suggested, is determined by characters making choices. The kind of plot, serious or comic, is dependent upon the kinds of characters involved (wise or foolish) and the nature of the choices these characters make (wise or foolish). The mechanisms of humour are closely bound up with the mechanisms of plot; that is, likewise dependent on the kind of characters and the kind of choices they make. Satire is not, strictly speaking, interdependent with plot;

rather, satire depends on keeping the object of ridicule clearly in view, and it matters little how improbable, illogical, or unmotivated the sequence of events in which the object of ridicule appears.

iii. Verbal Comedy

Not unexpectedly, given the essential quality of ridicule, Dunbar relies heavily on comic animal imagery or the more debasing animal facts of life to establish his tone, sometimes in combination. Both of the comic dream-vision poems make use of low-level physical buffoonery. Damian, who transforms himself into a monstrous bird, is severely mauled, beaten, bitten, castrated, and extensively abused before plunging "up to the ene" in a mire following his fall. His physical defilement, no doubt fulfilling Dunbar's secret wishes, charts his inner corruption, his outrageous pride and deserved failure. The Highlanders of Fasternis Evin in Hell swarm into the Devil's court and sound like an obnoxious flock of scavenger birds; and the cobbler, tailor, and Devil engage in scatological clownishness, soiling themselves and each other primarily with material from either end of the stomach. The humour depends largely on physical mistreatment in these final episodes, and it is difficult, even recognizing the freedom with which medieval poets availed themselves of this kind of comedy, for a modern audience to respond with the poet-dreamer as he wakes himself with laughter at their unseemly enterprise. The "Tway Cummeris" makes a modified use of physical humour: lounging by the fire is one gossip who "God wait gif scho wes grit and fatt, / 3it to be feble scho did hir fene" (6-7); the pair are sexually unhappy (23) and heavy drinkers, "Thay drank twa quartis sowp and sowp, / Off drowth sic exces did thame strene" (27-28)--in short, they are excessively dedicated to pleasures.

Here the physical business is much subtler, and thematically important, providing an ironic counterpoint between their gross animal needs and expected religious abstinence, the incongruity of their wants versus society's expectations.

"The Wowing of the King" stands midway between grotesque animal behaviour and comic animal imagery. The lamb and fox are engaged in an incongruous sexual liaison, to say the least. They behave absurdly as lovers, especially the fox, when they embrace, grope, and kiss, and later as he grovels ignominiously beneath the lamb's protective fleece in order to escape the wolf's detection. But they are human beings in animal form, symbolizing man at his bestial worst, unreasoning, unprincipled, instinctual, to their spiritual detriment utterly "natural." Dunbar frequently uses animal imagery as comic insult, through identification with beasts reducing his characters to clumsy victims of their own unchecked passions. "In Secreit Place" makes use of some comic physical business--the lover looks absurd ("His bony berd wes kemd and croppit, / Bot all with kaill it wes bedroppit," 8-9), and after a promising start (48) seems to suffer an impotent lapse (62)--but Dunbar constantly uses reinforcing animal imagery, especially in suggesting a comically incestuous calf-cow relationship (23-25) that equates physical with sexual appetite (as he says, "My wame is of 3our lufe so fow," 18), to point up their physical lust. It is degradatory humour; Dunbar ridicules his characters for giving way to their bestial natures, condemning them for failures mental and moral.

The Tretis produces the most sustained use of comic animal imagery. The women apply it to their husbands and themselves--ultimately reducing all characters to primitive, debased animals--degrading the men and exalting themselves. The women variously compare their spouses

with cats (120), dogs (186, 273), coward roosters (215, 320), loathsome scorpions and insects (91-92), hedgehog skin and boar bristles (107, 95), and diseased cart-horses (113-14). They liken themselves to free flying and beautifully plumed birds (243, 371, 374, 382), or tigers (261), dragons (263), or venomous adders (266).⁵⁴ The equation of the female with powerful and aggressive animals comes almost entirely from the Wedo's contribution to the discussion. Their carefully programmed use of such imagery reduces men to the level of domesticated animals, often sick, humbled, even emasculated animals ("I that grome geldit had of gudis and of natur," boasts the Wedo, 392; my italics); and raises the womens' image to free-spirited birds or "powerful, cruel, predatory animals" whose desire for irresponsibility--promiscuity and not love--suggests "not a natural but a highly unnatural, perverted state of affairs."⁵⁵ The Wedo's sexual boast of herself as a victorious cock (326) perfectly epitomises this comic social and spiritual perversion.

Dunbar supports his humorous uses and twists of convention and his comic caricaturizations with a variety of humorous verbal devices. Irony, incongruous juxtapositions of thought against action, appearance against reality, character or audience expectations and desires against social and moral standards, is everywhere evident. Take the two gossips, as one representative example, already "richt airlie" (1) hard in their cups on the first morning of Lent, comforting each other with self-congratulations on abstemiousness, one sympathizing with her fat yet "feble" companion "3e tak that nigirtnes of 3our muder; / All

54. Priscilla Bawcutt, "Aspects of Dunbar's Imagery," in Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins, ed. Beryl Rowland, (London: 1974), 190-200.

55. Ibid., 197-98.

wyne to test scho wald disdane / Bot mavasy" ("Tway Cummeris," 12-14). The suggestion of mother as a drunkard, of their being used to the finest wines, of their easy hypocrisy, the absurd use of "nigartnes," and the unstated inference that wine during Lent--forbidden anyway--should remind them of Christ's redeeming blood, all chime richly together in a complex ironic relationship.

Depending on the desired tone and satiric intent, Dunbar employs in varying mixtures flyting-technique insult and invective; puns and double entendre; and comic euphemism. A poetic scold in The Fen3eit Freir, Dunbar tries to crush Damian under a landslide of insults: he straightforwardly labels him (and libels him) a Turk (5), murderer (20), Jew begotten of giants (31-32), a monster (110), and variants on these themes, comparing him with blasphemous pagans, such as Daedalus, and pagan deities to reinforce his antichristian depravity (65-68). In a more lighthearted manner he freely abuses the cobbler and tailor in their hellish tournament with insulting epithets ("A prick louse and ane hobbell clowtar," 125; or "harlottis," 214), and disgusting descriptions ("Ane rak of fartis lyk ony thunner / Went fra him," 155-56; and "He left his sadill all beshitten," 191). And the wives of the Tretis bring out the cruelest and most invective insults of all to apply to their husbands, especially vehement in the mouths of the Wedo and, as here, the first wife:

"I have ane wallidrag, ane worme, and auld wobat carle,
A waistit wolroun na worth bot wourdis to clatter;
Ane bumbart, ane dron bee, and bag full of flewme,
Ane scabbit skarth, ane scorioun, and scutarde behind."
(89-92)

She proves herself a scold of the first order.

Puns, double entendre, and comic euphemisms, however, regularly appear in the lust-poems, "The Wowing of the King," "In Secreit Place,"

and the Tretis. Terms from amour courtois such as grace, mercy, comfort, courage, and danger invariably turn up--as, comically, they seem to have been originally intended, initially purloined from religious and knightly usage--as thinly veiled euphemisms for love-making. Such also, from folk literature, are terms like "werk" or "the dirrydan." Other words or phrases, like "quhillelillie" or "my stang dois storkyn with 3our towdie" ("In Secreit Place," 34, 48; my italics) for penis, or "prenecod" ("The Wowing of the King," 39) and "Venus chalmer" (the Tretis, 183 and 431) for vagina, euphemistically skirt around naming genitalia with contextually absurd delicacy. Dunbar's puns are primarily sexual, having the same bawdy, deflationary comic function as euphemism: the fox was "ane lang taild beist and grit with all," his "innocent" lamb "ane morsall of delyte" (joining sexual and literal appetite again in one image), and their affair went unwitnessed, "I wait nocht gif he gaif hir grace, / Bot all the hollis wes stoppit hard" ("The Wowing of the King," 17, 23, 47-48). In the Tretis, the Wedo discusses her cuckolded husband in terms of being "miskennyt" (380), herself misknown in the Biblical sense, and her lovers as possessed of "a stout curage" or even equipped with "a stif standand thing" that "staiffis in mi neiff" (485-86). Dunbar's puns are for the most part traditional, centre around loveplay, and do not seem to engage in learned jokes nor in fact appear to be very witty at all. His verbal play, however, is in keeping with the poems' thematic concerns and satiric tone; and Dunbar will also ironically juxtapose levels of language against one another for an incongruous effect, as we have seen when the lover of "In Secreit Place" plies his traditional amour courtois euphemisms only to have the poet parade his naked desires by remarking "3it be his feiris he wald haif fukkit" (13). Dun-

bar's language is decorous, unified with and appropriate to his matter.

All of the poems under consideration rely on absurdity of situation, to a great extent in "The Wowing of the King" and the dream-visions The Fen3eit Freir and Fasternis Evin in Hell, in which fantasy plays a major role; and to a lesser extent in the "Tway Cummeris," "In Secreit Place," and the Tretis, which explore exaggerated but possible human lusts. Dunbar also makes use of two related rhetorical devices, repetitio and a crescendo effect.

Repetition gives a poem a theme-and-variations structure. It can be as small a unit as an ironic refrain line, such as "This lang Lentern makis me lene," though a small repetition is more difficult, as here, holding our attention on the gossips' hypocrisy and providing less "variation" than heightens increasing irony. Or, more typically, it can appear in larger patterns, such as the disguise-and-unmasking motif throughout Damian's career, and the parallel actions of the tailor and cobbler as they enter the lists or the repeated appearance of effluvia culminating in Mahoun's "unblast" joke ending Fasternis Evin in Hell. This last is also a crescendo effect, a build-up of materials (imagery, action, and so forth) to an exaggerated climax. The mounting catalogue of Damian's crimes and spiritual affronts, and the prolonged use of ever more ridiculous and elaborate love-epithets in "In Secreit Place," provide further illustrations of comic crescendi. A subtler use of comic crescendo is employed in "The Wowing of the King." Each stanza is so structured as to place the most absurd development yet in the sequence of events in the penultimate line, just before the ironic refrain: for example, "Scho fled him nocht--fair mot hir fall!", "The lamb than cheipit lyk a mows," or "The 3owis besyd thay maid na din," (20, 55, 62), all followed by the poet's chorusing

amazement.

The Tretis successfully melds both repetitio and crescendo. It presents a clear structure of theme-and-variations on marital dissatisfactions (old husbands are bad lovers; youthful husbands are not the answer), and rises up to an exaggerated, unbelievable climax envisioning perfectly enjoyed promiscuous love (476-96), emphasized by verbal echoes and variations. The poem contains general repetition of discourse in that the ladies lament awful marital conditions, propose an idealized love-life, and end laughing and drinking heartily; and specific repetition of imagery (e.g. men as draw-horses, 114 and 355), ideas (e.g. birds' freedom, 60 and 238), and actions (e.g. "selling" the husband his marital rights, 134-36 and 364-68; or remaining on the lookout in public places for a new lover, 81-83 and 434-35). The Wedo's "lessonis" (503) provide an exaggerated portrait of wifely shrewery (296ff.), womanly wiles and hypocrisy (423-61), and insatiable female luxury ("I comfort thaim all," 489), concluding with an exalted vision of herself as the whore universal presiding over a Venusian mansion well-stocked with adoring bachelors (475-504). Each of Dunbar's satiric mimetic transcripts are simple, single-interpretation structures--even the more complex Tretis exhibits monolinear development of sequential episodes--which employ hyperbole, repetition, and crescendo climaxes to sustain comic action.

iv. Satiric Intent

A feature conspicuously absent from Dunbar's humorous mimetic transcripts is the use of the explicit moralitas, either incorporated in the poem or appended to it, the didactic lesson to be drawn from the action. The closest the poet comes to direct commentary on an ac-

tion is the understated, coy refrain "And that me thocht ane ferly cace" from "The Wowing of the King." In an age such as ours, which values understatement and audience rather than authorial inference, this is taken as a positive virtue, even as a sign of a shift away from medieval to modern artistic sensibilities.

Dunbar's reticence about supplying didactic commentary, however, has been further interpreted as an indication of his moral neutrality as a comic writer. (Let me leave aside momentarily the conceptual difficulty of a morally "neutral" satirist.) Roderick Lyall, for example, in noting the unique features of "The Wowing of the King" as an animal fable, points out the absence of a moralitas, normally a common feature. He describes the poem's method as "allusive rather than homiletic," and asserts that "Dunbar is not really adopting a moral position."⁵⁶ Critics have been especially willing to exonerate the Tretis as non-censorious, wild and ribald good fun. John Speirs felt that the poem, chocked full with "comic zest, sheer enjoyment and appetite, reaches its maximum of bursting exuberance" which must be viewed as "primarily comic, not satiric."⁵⁷ Catherine Singh, describing the poet as "neutral" and the poem as "amoral," essentially agrees that Dunbar was not being satiric: the womens' histories are presented merely as a comic contrast; the reader is left to his own judgment regarding their morals.⁵⁸

56. Lyall, op. cit., 20 and 22. The fox's playful attitude, and the lamb's seeming culpability in the "seduction," "typifies Dunbar's refusal to adopt an explicit, simplistic moral stance."

57. John Speirs, "William Dunbar," Scrutiny, 7 no. 1 (June 1938), 56-68.

58. Singh, op. cit., 30. Also compare the more generous claims for the Tretis of A.D. Hope, A Midsummer Eve's Dream, (New York: 1970), 266: the poem presents "a vision of woman which is more than a satiric caricature. It has in it something of the heroic, portentous, and magnanimous. It has less of the medieval moralist than of the Re-

These attitudes bear consideration, not least because they betray modern appreciations of human nature. Certainly these two poems are, broadly speaking, more good-natured than for example the two satiric dream-visions. There is an implied blanket condemnation of the Seven Deadly Sins, the Highlanders, and the cobbler and tailor who dance, play, and joust in Hell, lorded over by a ridiculous devil-figure with no significant powers--at least during the tournament--save the ability to humiliate. Damian is presented as a worse devil, damned by man and beast as monstrous and murderous, a charlatan and contender for the role of Antichrist. There is no doubt whatever on which side of God he stands. The satire is unequivocal. In the other two poems as well there is no special moral lesson drawn. But the lovers of "In Secreit Place" and gossips of the "Tway Cummeris" are ridiculous figures recklessly following their physical passions, careless of their spiritual peril: the lovers are lecherous, the gossips hypocrites, and they are fools altogether. Though the "Tway Cummeris" has a more sophisticated level of satire, compact and neatly executed, both pairs of characters are made to look absurd while engaging in immoral activities. None of these poems explicitly condemn the behaviour witnessed; Dunbar relies on inference, on an in-built moral viewpoint (more easily done in the strictly codified medieval period than in our own "valueless" age), holding their behaviour up to be measured against assumed moral standards. There is no moralitas; but the consistent comic condemnation is clearly implied.

"The Wowing of the King," accepting the title as genuine, is a

naissance humanist questioning accepted values and attitudes and aware of the extraordinary variety...in human affairs and the organization of society."

special case. It would be neither appropriate nor healthy for Dunbar to judge his sovereign's deeds; and Dunbar, with his tongue-in-cheek mock-wonder, his animal disguises for the players, and his urbane, amused, and indulgent tone, has gone to great lengths to be inoffensive and to avoid even the appearance of giving judgment. The poet shares the fox's love conquest and escape with a conspiratorial wink. But inherent in such egalitarian treatment is a comic reduction in the King's dignity, a levelling off of the King, the poet, and the audience, and so the reader experiences a sense of superior laughter, laughter at the expense of the King comically degraded by his own libidinal folly. Implicit condemnation--exposure to ridicule--is certainly present, especially in the wolf's frightening interruption. A specific moral lesson aimed at curbing the King's moral appetite is both out of place and unnecessary; knowing the identity of the fox, its absence is not felt.

Yet as we have seen, even if the equation of the fox with James IV proves unacceptable, the characters are ridiculous. The fox is foolish in his loveplay and entrapment, the lamb and ewes in their collusion, and the sexually betrayed wolf in his gullibility. Because they are made out to be animals they are symbolic creatures of "natural" appetite (here unnaturally misdirected), giving their irrational desires free reign, behaviour acceptable perhaps in real beasts but condemnable in men. In either interpretation, though with greater comic power if we accept the Bannatyne title, the characters are morally degraded and intellectually inferior. Even at his most playful Dunbar is a tacit satirist.

To suggest that the Tretis takes no moral stance or makes no satiric statement is to stray wide of the mark. It is true that the bold

wife, the shy wife, and the master harlot Wedo gain some of our sympathy regarding their complaints against the constraining feudal marriage-system which denies them choice in romantic love and considers them chattel to be traded for temporal emoluments.⁵⁹ Yet, just as the lamb possibly acquiesces to the wishes of the foxish King in order to stay in his graces, there is a clear suggestion that sex in marriage is used as a means of climbing the social ladder (cf. lines 135-41 and 291-95). This complaint is severely undermined in the Wedo's case when, for his money, she chooses to marry a rich merchant beneath her social station and mercilessly, despicably torments him until and even after his death. But clearly no husband or any one man would satisfy for long. Given their preferences, the women would choose complete promiscuity, the use and misuse of men, a lustful yet loveless satisfaction of their basest carnal instincts which, in view of their rational and immortal souls, is worse than the coupling of beasts. We may understand the source of their hypocrisy and anti-spousal raillery; but it is more difficult to forgive the tenets of their essentially selfish and irresponsible "ideal" programme of love. Nor can it be denied that their behaviour would be damned by the Church and society in real life. Their flaws are internal, not imposed upon them from the outside, and their perverse faults carry overwhelmingly troubled theological implications. Dunbar is evidently having fun, but the satiric intent is undeniable.

Dunbar plants suggestions, especially toward the close of the Wedo's "soverange teching," of a parody Garden of Eden. The poem's setting,

59. Tom Scott, *op. cit.*, 206-211, makes a fuss over the womens' "justly" rebellious spirits and Dunbar's "revolutionary" sympathy with their plight.

framing the ladies' dialogue, is a beautiful garden in a perfect season with plenty to eat and drink, not surprisingly a paradisaical place conducive to natural behaviour. But the women, already fallen, represent the corruption at its core. They know good from evil, having tasted abundantly of the latter, but it does not bother them to pursue their pleasures even if it alienates them further from God. The Wedo--and this is in accordance with the amour courtois law of secrecy--defines moral turpitude simply in terms of getting caught: "we wemen, / We set us all fra the syght to syle men of treuth. / We dule for na evill deid, sa it be derne haldin" (448-50). She forgets that the garden is being watched, their every deed known to the judge in Heaven. In the next lines she supplies the reader with an unconscious ironic reminder that no creature but the Creator watches and knows their doings:

"Wise wemen has wayis and wonderfull gydingis
With gret engyne to bejaip ther jolyus husbandis,
And quyetyly with sic craft convoyis our materis
That under Crist no creatur kennis of our doingis."
(451-54; my italics)

Her "fallen" mind entirely on cupiditas, she is blind to the damnable state of her soul. The reminder of a link with Adam becomes explicit near the end of the poem. Once again the garden, full of singing fowls--possibly a pun?--by now an emblem identified with the women, is invoked:

The sueit savour of the sward, singing of foulis,
Myght confort ony creatur of the kyn of Adam
And kindill agane his curage thocht it wer cald sloknyt.
(520-22)

Again the word "creatur" appears, and the now doubly ironic (because straightforward) uses of the amour courtois terms "confort" and "curage." These puns, echoing reminders, refer indirectly to sexual activity sparked by the song of the lecherous birds, birds providing a

kind of matins service for the kin of fallen man.

Worse still is the Wedo's parody of the Church Universal, concluding her erotic mock-saint's legend. It is she, the all-embracing harlot ruling over the adherents of the luxurious Court of Venus, who shall "comfort thaim all." As the Catholic Church offers caritas and salvation to all men's souls, so the Wedo inversely offers damning cupiditas and sexual "mercy" to any man who might otherwise be "lost":

"Thar is no liffand leid sa law of degre
That sall me luf unluffit, I am so loik hertit;
And gif his lust be so lent in to my lyre quhit
That he be lost or with me lig, his lif sall nocht danger.
I am so mercifull in mynd and menis all wichtis,
My sely saull salbe saif quhen Sabot all jugis.

(497-502)

She has perverted the term "mercy" completely out of context, yet is unaware of it or in spite of it has the audacity to think her "innocent soul" shall be preserved when the Last Judgement is pronounced. The irony is exceedingly heavy. No one among Dunbar's audience could have doubted how far from the truth her blasphemous self-assurances or missed the parodic comparison. The blasphemy is grotesque comic exaggeration, perfect shrewery and perfect whoredom. We can imagine the discomfort of the married lords listening to the ladies' reported tirade and wondering about their own wives. Apparently addressing an all-male audience of "auditors most honourable" (527), Dunbar poses a final, ironic demande d'amour of his own to the bachelors: "Quhilk wald 3e waill to 3our wife gif 3e suld wed one?" (530). The implied question to the married men is "Which do you recognize as your own?" His moral damnation and satiric character assassination has been thorough. He knows very well what the answer would be in finally turning the joke against his audience.

Dunbar, making implicit use of society's values and moral ideals

especially regarding the invariable failure of excessive pride, consistently assumes a morally superior position. He sometimes invokes incongruous laughter; but primarily he aims at raising the laughter of superiority. His satire is usually implicit, as in "The Wowing of the King" or the Tretis, a method that demands a "right-minded" audience sharing his attitude of ironic condemnation. Yet the element of ridicule in his satires is always explicit, a scorn easily detected on the surface of the poems. There is a sense, then, in which Dunbar can be considered a non-moral satirist, for he never engages in serious satire. Serious satire, such as Henryson's, is used primarily to educate and guide, to correct through laughter vice and folly in the behaviour of one's fellows; the fault(s), not the individual, is exposed to ridicule. In ridiculing satire, the type Dunbar invariably employs, this admixture is inverted. There is some element of education, of moral conservatism, of warning about the enemies within society; but this is of secondary importance and must be inferred, an implication based on pre-existent social values. Ridicule of the individual(s) is placed in the foreground; and the nature of their fault is, in a sense, almost inconsequential. Dunbar cites the failings and follies of his characters with no obvious or apparent corrective aim but merely to castigate them, to laugh at them on their way to or in Hell. He is not interested in examining the motives of his characters, as I have shown in discussing the nature of his caricatures; and he rarely exhibits anything remotely resembling humane sympathy for their condition. The individual, not the fault, is usually under attack. His satire is non-redemptive, and he adds no moralitas lesson because he has no intention of educating his audience to better behaviour as his first motive: no moral salvation is being offered. He uses comedy

to destroy or ridicule, to hold up lovers and women in general, and Damian and cobblers and tailors (or Thomas Norny, James Doig, Walter Kennedy, a "Blak-moir," etc.) in particular, to public humiliation. We may enjoy his satires, admiring the technical skill, wit, and play with convention. But considered on an ethical basis they are more difficult to approve of. Dunbar can be accused of using ridicule to crush opponents, for example Damian and other rivals for preferment (such as "Thir Ladyis fair that in the Court ar Kend," No. 71); or to attack the intellectually weak and morally defenceless (such as the women he damns) for sport, with no better end in mind than raising a laugh at their expense. It is hard to decide which is worse, using invective where he has something personally to gain (such as court favour) or where he has nothing personally to gain but his bread as an entertainer.

We can describe Henryson with justice as a humorist, in the strict sense of the word. Dunbar is a masterful comic poet and ridiculing satirist. But because of his own ethical shortcomings, his lack of sympathy for others, and his penchant for using satire as a weapon first and only secondarily as a didactic tool, we cannot fairly claim the title of "humorist" for Dunbar as well.

Chapter Six

SIR DAVID LINDSAY

The flash of that satiric rage,
Which, bursting on the early stage,
Branded the vices of the age,
And broke the keys of Rome.

--Sir Walter Scott, Marmion, IV.vii.

Sir David Lindsay (1490-1555), following one pattern set by Dunbar, is a satiric court poet concerned with topical instead of a more universal subject matter. Like all satirists, he seeks to expose the vices and follies he sees prevalent in society. But his work,¹ unlike Henryson's except in its aura of didactic selflessness, shows little interest in "reproving the whole misliving of man." Lindsay instead is interested in reforming particular shortcomings and moral deficiencies in each of the Three Estates, with special emphasis on the abuses of the clergy. The title of his play, Ane Satyre of the Thre Estaitis, is an apt one for his entire body of poetry: the same basic themes recur throughout his work, castigation of social, political, and ecclesiastical failings present from his earliest verses to his last. Lindsay bridges the late medieval world and Reformation Scotland. From his earliest days at court Lindsay had been involved in educating the young James V; and, given the climate of political change and intense religious fervour, it is therefore not surprising to find him continuing in this didactic capacity throughout his literary career.

Latest of the major Middle Scots makars, Lindsay is also the most

1. I refer to The Works of Sir David Lindsay, ed. Douglas Hamer, 4 vols., STS 3rd Ser. 1, 2, 6, 8, (Edinburgh & London: 1931-36). Compared to Henryson or Dunbar, Lindsay's history is well-known; and his poetic canon and a rough chronology of that canon are reasonably well-established, thanks largely to printed editions and stationer's records.

prolific, monochromatic, and least accomplished craftsman among them. For more than two centuries after his death Lindsay's reputation in Scotland eclipsed that of all earlier, Catholic, Scottish poets. However, this popularity was to some extent accidental, solidly based on thematic content rather than on artistic merit: that is, Lindsay energetically promoted the political and ethical issues of his age which came to triumph, heralding and championing the causes important to the Reformation. In addition, breaking at times from the otherwise steady diet of "right-minded," serious verse-sermonizing with farce, he made use of vigorous colloquial Scots and low comedy aimed at pleasing the general audience. Thus he reflected the prejudices and tastes of the middle classes which came to dominate Scotland. He had the further advantage of living in an age when the printing press had firmly established itself; a broad dissemination of his work also helped to ensure its survival.

Critics over the last century have generally found Lindsay to be a polemicist first and only secondarily a craft-conscious poet, lacking the skill of a Dunbar, the imagination of a Douglas, and the intellectual depth of a Henryson.² He is admirable as a court figure and

2. See, for example, David Irving, History of Scottish Poetry, (Edinburgh: 1861), 338-42; J.H. Millar, A Literary History of Scotland, (London: 1903), 87-91; T.F. Henderson, Scottish Vernacular Literature, 3rd ed., (Edinburgh: 1910), 205-208; G. Gregory Smith, Scottish Literature, (London: 1919), 10-11; William Murison, Sir David Lyndsay, (Cambridge: 1938), esp. pp. 75-79; Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature, (Edinburgh & London: 1958), 91-102; C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama, (Oxford: 1954), 100-105; John Speirs, The Scottish Literary Tradition, 2nd ed., (London: 1962), 77-82; and Maurice Lindsay, History of Scottish Literature, (London: 1977), 68-70. Roderick Lyall, "Narrative Technique and Moral Purpose in Middle Scots Poetry," (Unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow: 1979), 409-57, is the most recent critic to examine Lindsay's work at length; and he is fairly generous in his assessment despite pointing out that Lindsay's poems are on the whole encyclopedic, loosely struc-

as a human being, fearlessly critical of injustice and compassionate toward the ordinary citizen, a man of sincerely held and forcefully expressed convictions. But Lindsay has decided limitations as an artist, displaying erratic skill as a versifier and narrow range as a thinker. He rarely uses poetry for any other purpose than propaganda (educating to a viewpoint, decrying faults and exhorting to correction); and he rarely exhibits any other mood than earnest moral superiority, despite his several humble claims not to be a "worthie" poet and to be writing for "rural folke."³ His weaknesses include limited rhymes, repetition of phrase and occasionally entire passages, monotonous tone and obsession with a very few themes, and a heavy reliance on literary convention without attempting to breathe new life into traditional materials. Much of his poetry is prolix, diffuse, lacking unity, and prone to preaching, often at the expense of mimetic propriety. As a satirist, Lindsay has been charged with being "a superficial pupil of Dunbar...dull and commonplace";⁴ and his poetry damned as full of "dead

tured, and overly didactic. Because Ane Satyre of the Thre Estaitis is so dominant, "the poems understandably appear to be relatively insignificant. They are, too, not especially poetic poems, in which the satirical and propagandist element apparently preponderates over stylistic factors such as versification, diction and rhetorical elaboration. In this respect Lindsay has much in common with other sixteenth century Scottish exponents of the plain style" (p. 409). Lyall elaborates further one "major weakness: Lindsay's tendency towards polysyllabic formulae without much narrative or rhetorical value, coupled with diffuseness of both syntax and thought. Lindsay is at his best when the context carries him along, either through the rhetorical fervour of his satire or through the weight of the narrative or descriptive material" (p. 416).

3. Cf. his uses of the humility topos: Testament of Papyngo, 55-72; The Dreame, 50-56; The Complaynt of Schir Dauid Lindesay, 29-34; and The Monarchie, 100-117.
4. Henderson, op. cit., 206. He continues: "much of his effect as a satirist is due to the fact that the subject lent itself so easily to satire. Merely to state the truth...was almost satire sufficient. Still, to state it as he stated it implied at least an ardent and strong, if not quite poetic, personality; and though his wit too of-

conventional matter."⁵ Such views are somewhat uncharitable, however, for much of Lindsay's thematic "dullness" pertains to the fact that he was preoccupied with the burning issues of his day, issues which are no longer topical and so lacking the initial interest and impact they once carried. Yet even Lindsay's most sympathetic critics find little to praise in his poetic artistry, and speak more broadly of his public-spirited qualities as a zealous social critic.⁶ His most praiseworthy achievement, as the headnote from Sir Walter Scott indicates (and for the reasons Scott suggests), is his play Ane Satyre of the Thre Es-taitis. Murison, among others, asserts that Lindsay's "greatest strength lies in his dramatic skill";⁷ "yet," counters Gregory Smith, "it is hard to recall in that long play, or in any of his poems, a single character or episode which is self-explained or real."⁸ Crit-

ten sinks into mere buffoonery, the buffoonery is not without cleverness, and the wit no doubt thoroughly enjoyed by the rude community to whom it was addressed" (p. 208).

5. Speirs, op. cit., 78.
6. See, for example, Wittig, op. cit., 96, who paints a glowing image of a manly, independent, man-of-the-people type of poet, noting "Democracy and social justice are Lindsay's main themes. They induced him to champion the cause of the Reformation." Cf. also Irving, op. cit., 340; Murison, op. cit., 77; Lindsay, op. cit., 70. C.S. Lewis, op. cit., 100-105, is perhaps Lindsay's most sympathetic critic of recent years. He finds graceful passages that charm or please in a number of Lindsay's poems. Reserving his highest praise for Squyer Meldrum, he rates Lindsay as a "major" poet, and declares his characteristics to be "Decorum, discipline, [and] a perfect understanding of his aim and of the means to that aim" (p. 105).
7. Murison, op. cit., 78.
8. G. Gregory Smith, op. cit., 11. Smith's opinion is one with which I can sympathize but not agree. For example, the Pardoner's divorce of the Sowtar from his wife in Ane Satyre (2122-79), or, as we shall see, incidents in Squyer Meldrum are memorably brought to life. Smith seems to discount Lindsay's purposes and conventions. Moreover, it is absurd to expect to find "real" characters in a Morality drama or in allegorical poetry.

ical opinion for the most part seems to divide itself between qualified praise for Lindsay as a social reformer and varying degrees of distaste for his endlessly didactic and so disappointing poetic achievements. This is likely to remain the case the more distant the concerns of the Reformation become.

The poems of Lindsay subject to this study are his mock-confession/complaint poems, "Kitteis Confessioun" (c. 1545), The Testament and Complaint of the Papyngo (1530), The Confessioun and Complaint of Bagsche (c. 1535); and his burlesque peasant-tournament, "The Iusting Betuix Iames Watsoun and Ihone Barbour" (c. 1539).⁹ These satires deal with various of the Three Estates, mocking the bourgeoisie ("The Iusting"), warning presumptuous courtiers (Bagsche), exposing corruption in the clergy ("Kitteis Confessioun"), or both admonishing the king and court and attacking holy orders (Papyngo).

I am forced to omit a close study of Lindsay's best effort, his acknowledged masterpiece Ane Satyre of the Thre Estaitis: though satiric, it is dramatic rather than narrative in nature. As a result, though admittedly an incomplete estimate, my investigation will do little to alter the unhappy general impression of rather middling work. Ane Satyre, and other poems, are nevertheless important for thematic comparisons; and one feature revealed by even a cursory glance at Ane Satyre is that though Lindsay's satiric themes are topical his comedic vehicles are quite traditional. For example, the Cupar Banns, the advertisement-play forerunning Ane Satyre, contains the exposure of a miles gloriosus-figure (238-69) and a fabliau love-triangle (a foolish old man, a frisky wife locked in a chastity belt, and a lover-Fool

9. Lindsay, I, 124-27, 56-90, 92-99, and 114-16, respectively.

bearing a key and an impressive phallus, 142-235). Ane Satyre itself makes use of topsy-turvy domestic situations (e.g. a henpecked husband beaten by his shrewish wife, 1134-67), elements of a flyting (Diligence versus Pauper, 1939-60) and a chanson de mal mariée (2135-45), a mock-divorce ceremony of the crudest animal kind (2152-2179), the roguish confessions of a false Pardoner (2042ff.; 2183-2289), and a final sermo stultorum reminiscent of the traditional Feast of Fools (4466-4612). Engagingly handled, each of these episodes have plentiful antecedents in medieval comic literature. Lindsay's humour stays firmly within the bounds of proven formulae.

I must also omit Lindsay's other masterpiece from sustained examination, The Historie and Testament of Squyer Meldrum (1550). Although it is a narrative poem containing humorous elements, it is not strictly mimetic or comic.¹⁰ Yet it is worth pausing briefly to examine the poem's ironic love-scenes involving ladies of Craigfergus and Glen-Carnick eagles, for in these self-contained episodes we see Lindsay's fine comic touch in treating amour courtois.

Both scenes are essentially serious--in keeping with the "romance"--with ironic overtones. The lady whom Meldrum succours in Craigfergus is presented most unusually: stark naked, in the process of being despoiled by two soldiers (105-112). Her indecent exposure, and the circumstances, are not in themselves comic. But Meldrum's fastidious courtesy in coming to her rescue, and later in taking his leave, lends

10. Squyer Meldrum is a serious romantic biography with some light-hearted elements, partly a conventional romance yet not strictly fiction. The poem presents the mirror of a chivalrous life; and, one of Lindsay's rare poems unencumbered with didacticism, it is a triumph of his art as a story-teller. A realistic romance, it is told with brio and affection. Some poems, like The Tragedie of the Late Cardinal Beaton, are not fictitious at all but didactic chronicles in verse.

an incongruous and then comically strained air to the proceedings. His initial involvement is curiously neutral, demanded by his profession but not, apparently, gladly willed. This comic neutrality seeds his later efforts to disentangle himself from the affair. He responds to her pleas, but in confronting the soldiers is not stern, angry, demanding, or vigorous: swearing no oaths, he "softlie" requests that the men give back her "sark" so that she might be decently covered (118-19); he does not ask that they give back all their spoils. They obstinately refuse. Meldrum is slow to rouse, still "courteous" (133) of speech--ironic politeness in a situation of stress--but now more insistent. When they offer violence he slaughters them both and returns her clothing. Since the Scots are the invading army, in all probability he has just killed two of his own countrymen. Lindsay does not divulge the origin of the soldiers, but this may account for Meldrum's initial reluctance to be forceful with them.

The main comedy, however, lies in the lady's insistence in taking him for her husband. Having helped her, Meldrum tries to leave; but, obviously impressed, she detains him with hugs and kisses and adopts an unfeminine, aggressive stance by proposing marriage, offering herself and her considerable wealth. Meldrum, comically paralleling his earlier behaviour, is equally slow to rise to this proposal. Like Gawain besieged by Bercilak's wife, Meldrum is caught ironically between the conventions of courtesy and his personal desires. She is a citizen of an enemy power, and he does not wish to marry her. Yet courtesy, honour, and politeness all demand, as they had at the beginning of the affair, that he treat her with love and respect. Therefore he offers a definite "perhaps," making it conditional upon a future peace: "per-
chance, / And after that the Peice be maid, / To marie 3ow I will be

glaid" (190-92; my italics). She instantly places a "love-token" ring on his finger and suggests that she go with him (195-98)--an act that would mean the automatic forfeiture of her present riches. Thanking her "hartfullie" (199)--his politeness is obviously starting to strain under the necessity of counter-insistence--he objects that she cannot sail aboard a man-o'-war. She responds quickly with the indecorous and brazen suggestion of dressing in a man's clothing (200-206). She is comically as persistent as she is uncomfortably forward, and Meldrum's polite desperation manifestly grows towards panic: finally commending her to God, he says farewell and "to the ship he rowit fast" (210-12; my italics). His is a narrow escape, his honour tried but intact. It is a delightful and deftly portrayed scene of ironic reversals in which the knight and lady trade roles as wooer and wooed; and in which the rescuer, hard pressed to continue following the chivalric code in their comic clash of wills, himself comes to need rescuing. The comic paradox is strong: he is in greater danger in love than in war.

His love-encounter with the widowed Lady of Gleneagles is rather more serious in mood. Instead of attempting to extricate himself from the embrace of an insistent female, Meldrum falls deeply and permanently in love. The lovers' initial meeting, dinner table chat, chess-playing, and formal "good-night" are straightforward scenes familiar from romance literature, as is Meldrum's short but pointed love-plaint (863-916). But the lady, overhearing him and finding her own sentiments voiced, ironically proves to be as forward as her counterpart in Craighfergus. On the flimsiest pretext, and attired in the flimsiest garb, she enters his room before dawn. Not only beautiful, she is provocatively half-naked. Lindsay, with ironic subtlety, reveals this by

casually interweaving in the general description of her charms these facts: "Hir Pappis wer hard, round, and quhyte" (945); "Hir schankis quhyte withouttin hose" (949); and "Hir Courlyke Kirtill was vnlaist" (953). Embracing her, Meldrum drops an ironically understated "Madame, gude-morne" (955). Lindsay handles their loveplay with sympathy, adult enjoyment (a rare pleasure, as sexual comedy tends to be puerile), and a comic coyness. Given their mutual desires and state of dress, the traditional amour courtois dialogue that follows--fervent declaration of love and supplication, demand of honourable intent, mutual promises of marriage (956-80)--is highly ironic. Enhancing this incongruity, their talk is laced with actions that are ironically revelatory, a physical undercurrent which counterpoints their fine speeches: "And talkit with hir on the flure; / Syne, quyetlie, did bar the dure" (961-62); "And aither vther sweitlie kist, / And wame for wame thay vther braissit" (984-85). Cupido at last intervenes, Meldrum lays her "intill his Bed," and a comically discreet Lindsay mockingly addresses his audience: "Iudge 3e gif he hir schankis shed" (993-94). He shows her pretending to be comically coy--"Allace (quod scho) quhat may this mene? / And with her hair scho dicht hir Ene" (995-96)--and then offers the apt, litotes-like speculation: "Bot I beleue scho said not nay" (998). It is brilliantly done--erotic, tender, and humorous all at once. In addition, several deliberate echoes from the scene at Craighfergus chime incongruously: e.g. the parallel nudity; the phrase "lufe for lufe agane" (208, 924); and the identical gifts to Meldrum of rings set with rubies (196, 1004). These echoes have the effect of heightening the irony, conforming to conventions of fine amour--except in parallel eagerness, a realistic view--but contrasting sharply with Meldrum's previous experience of women.

The delightful and sophisticated comedy of their wooing is followed by an appropriate anti-climax in which the lady defends her honour by comically parrying her servants' embarrassing questions. Their queries, with rising suspicion, grow progressively more suggestive. Her answers, ironic falsehoods, grow progressively less plausible; and our delight correspondingly increases:

(Quod thay) Madame, quhair haue 3e bene?
 (Quod scho) into my Gardine grene,
 To heir thir mirrie birdis sang.
 I lat 3ow wit, I thocht not lang,
 Thocht I had taryit their quhill None.
 (Quod thai) quhair wes 3our hois & schone?
 Quhy 3eid 3e with 3our bellie bair?
 (Quod scho) the morning wes sa fair:
 For, be him that deir Iesus sauld,
 I felt na wayis ony maner of cauld.
 (Quod thay) Madame, me think 3e sweit.
 (Quod scho) 3e see I sufferit heit;
 The dew did sa on flouris fleit
 That baith my Lymmies ar maid weit:
 Thairfoir ane quhyle I will heir ly,
 Till this dulce dew be fra me dry.
 (1011-26)

She manages to turn them aside and dismiss them before the wry, bawdy litany gets out of hand. It is tempting to see ironic double entendres in "heit," "ly," and "dulce dew"; and the dialogue, with its formal question-and-answer pattern and its four-line rhyme flourish just before closing, has a brilliant lyrical quality to it, perhaps the best thing of its kind in Lindsay's entire canon.

The scenes--witty, subtle, engaging, trifling playfully with convention, and delicately ironic--represent Lindsay at his humorous best. The poem is not a satire, and consequently works to produce an entertaining tale. It is a matter for regret that Lindsay more usually chose to compromise his obvious narrative gifts and talent for humour because of his obsession with educating his public.

Lindsay the satirist, as suggested, is a passionate preacher, a penchant that has the effect of suppressing his aesthetic sensibilities. The message conveyed in his satiric poems--be it political, religious, or moral--is his first priority; and his desire to instruct too often overbalances a simultaneous need to delight his readers, an aesthetic demand he manages admirably in the non-didactic Squyer Mel-drum. That is, he exhibits little "dramatic" sense in his satiric narratives, indecorously breaking with mimetic propriety in order to educate. It is difficult to account for this carelessness since he exhibits a keen dramatic sense in his plays. He does not reveal his themes through action; but quite often, and at great length, he plainly states them lest we miss his point. The resulting impression of inferior poetic skill in style and technique is reinforced by his frequent, straightforward reliance on time-worn ideas and a moralizing tone. The apparent imaginative failure, his obsession with theme to the detriment of the vehicle conveying it, is abetted by the fact that all of his satiric narratives are mimetic transcripts and not proper tales. As frequently distinguishes the two forms, plot (muthos) is subordinated to theme (dianoia) in the mimetic transcripts. His satires often lack structural unity and self-sustaining, internal dynamism. They are peopled with stick-figures, flat, poorly-motivated caricatures rather than more fully-fleshed characters; their puppet-like behaviour is too obviously manipulated by the poet and does not arise out of any consistent inner necessity. As I suggested in the last chapter, the narrative "incompleteness" of mimetic transcripts is at times valuable for creating the necessary distance between audience and subject required by ridiculing satires; and comic caricatures--one-dimensional, vice- or "humour"-governed personalities--may be ably em-

ployed in comedies. Lindsay, whose purpose of course is to ridicule and warn, does not attempt to create believable and sympathetic "real" characters. But the distance between audience and subject ought not be too wide; and breaks in the fictive texture--whether from prolonged editorial comment, characters' mismotivated deeds or speeches, or rhetorical vagueness--can create too great a gulf to sustain audience involvement. The further a satiric narrative is removed from comic tone, realized characters, and story proper, the more difficult it is to produce an artistically satisfying human comedy. We need only compare the plainly and consistently-motivated characters of Henryson's fox-trilogy in the Morall Fabillis with any of the characters in Lindsay's satires to perceive the difference in effectiveness.

Lindsay's aims, and limitations, can easily be seen in the poem "Kitteis Confessioun," a highly didactic anti-clerical satire. It is a situational mimetic transcript, and rather less dynamic than most after line 40, its story-elements being a dialogue of confession between a young woman of doubtful virtue and a corrupt curate. No other action than speech takes place, and no peripeteia occurs.

The basic comic premise of mimetic confessions is that they either damn the speaker or others, accusing others and inadvertently themselves with embarrassing or libelous admissions (as in Bagsche); or, as here, they damn the confessor for negligence and other abuses; or both (compare Henryson's The Fox and the Wolf). If the person confessing makes unwitting admissions of guilt, is ignorant or unrepentent, it is ironic and so raises incongruous laughter. That the audience is given the privilege of eavesdropping automatically puts the reader in the position of moral superiority, in a judgmental role. The bogus confession is potentially rewarding in that it can offer a two-edged

comic attack.

As a satire, "Kitteis Confessioun" begins on a promising enough note:

The Curate Kitte culd Confesse,
 And scho tald on baith mair and lesse.
 Quhen scho wes telland as scho wist,
 The Curate Kitte wald haue kist,
 Bot 3it ane countenance he bure,
 Degeist, deuote, daine, and demure,
 And syne began hir to exempne;
 He wes best at the efter game.
 (1-8)

Given the long-standing anti-feminist and anti-clerical satirical traditions, the "confessioun" in the title alone is sufficient to give rise to comic, indeed lurid, expectations. Such expectations seem to be confirmed by line 4, a suppressed desire to kiss signalling the curate's hypocrisy; and by the sexual innuendo of "after game." The curate's attention is obviously far from his duties; but, biding his time, he masks his desire behind a falsely pious facade, a countenance "deuote, daine, and demure." Ironically, "daine" and "demure" are often used in the context of courtly love, especially applied to women. This verbal counter-effect reinforces the view of the fraudulent friar as a worshipper of erotic and not charitable love.

Continuing his examination of her soul, the curate further damns himself in a series of asides ironically contrasting the ideal sanctity of the confessional with his flagrant abuse of privileged information:

(Quod he) haue 3e na wrangous geir?
 (Quod scho) I staw ane Pek of beir.
 (Quod he) that suld restorit be,
 Therefore delyuer it to me:
 Tibbe and Peter bad me speir,
 Be my conscience thay sall it heir.
 (Quod he) leue 3e in lecherie?
 (Quod scho) Will Leno mowit me.
 (Quod he) his wyfe that sall I tell,
 To mak hir acquaintance with my sell.
 (Quod he) ken 3e na Heresie?
 I wait nocht quhat that is (quod sche).

(Quod he) hard 3e na Inglis Bukis?
 (Quod scho) my Maister on thame lukis.
 (Quod he) the Bischop that sall know,
 For I am sworne that for to shaw.

(9-24)

The curate carries on with his comically impious antiphony, a pattern of question followed by honest response followed by selfish revelation of greed (12), lust (17-18), treachery (23-28), and egregious corruption ((26-27)). Their dialogue is swift, terse, and measured, its lively pace contributing to the comic effect. The curate is a self-aggrandising tell-tale, comically shattering the sanctity of the confessional in his readiness to turn to his own advantage the private information she supplies him. So doing he is less a ridiculous figure than an odious one, not merely foolish and vice-ridden but a cunning menace. Irony informs the caricature of the curate, from such small touches as his misuse of "conscience" (14) to the exaggerated corruption of all recognized religious ideals (chastity, poverty, humility) that he embodies. Though himself a thoroughgoing apostate and trust-breaking scoundrel, he is particularly watchful for treason against the Church ("Heresie" in the form of English translations of the Bible, 21-24)¹¹ and the State (26-28)--any sign of discontent and reform that might disrupt the power he currently enjoys.

But though the seeds of satiric comedy are sown, they are left uncultivated. The curate lasciviously suggests "I can nocht 3ow absolve, / Bot to my Chalmer cum at euin, / Absoluit for to be and schreuin" (30-32). One almost imagines him chuckling lewdly and smoothing a villain-

11. Compare the wicked friar Flattrie's similar fear of exposure when the truths of the New Testament are known by the general populace through vernacular translations, in Ane Satyre: "Dame Veritie hes lychtit now of lait, / And in hir hand beirand the Newtestament. / Be scho resauit but doubt we ar bot schent" (1089-96; or 1144-51).

ous black moustache, so broadly comic and obvious are his intentions. Yet the comic tone is sustained for merely another eight lines. Kitte, seeing through his real motivation, immediately sidesteps his suggestion ("I wyll pas tyll ane vther," 33). Sir Andrew, her alternate confessor, is by no means perfect either: she remarks that he displayed earlier an unseemly curiosity about her love-forays, at which the curate mutter enviously "I wald I had bene thare" (35-40). Again comically, he inadvertently ridicules himself by showing he is cut of the same cloth as Sir Andrew.

After this, for more than two-thirds of the entire poem, Kitte launches into a critical tirade, inveighing against the manifold failings of "drounkin schir Iohne latynlesse" (43, 76) and his clerical brethern. The anti-feminist satire we might have expected to receive parallel development does not materialize; indeed, for all her confessed sins, she emerges as admirably honest, intelligent, and pious, an incongruous contrast to the less well-informed men in religious orders. The satire of "Kitteis Confessioun" is directed wholly against the clergy. Lindsay, in his Dreme (172-215), envisioned Hell as being heaped with all kinds and ranks of apostate kirkmen "out of nummer." There they suffer for their covetousness, lust, ambition, simony, ignorance, abuse of privilege and power, and negligence of their spiritual responsibilities. Many of these same charges are brought to life in the speeches of the curate or in the accusations of Kitte. She concentrates mainly on the aspects of ignorance and negligence in her spiritual counsellors, ironically noting that Sir Andrew's Latin was a mere "hummill bummill" (43-45); that he conned no doctrine (she supplies a long, elaborate list of those points of learning which he did not bring to her attention, "He schew me nocht of Goddis word...Nor

schew he me of hellis pane" etc., 45-70); that his absolution was easily bought and his penance laughably simple to meet (71-76), even leading to renewed sinfulness. (He recommends a pilgrimage, which, as she says, is "the verry way to wantounes," 80-81.) The final third of the poem is taken up with a denunciation of the sacrament of auricular confession (95-140). All of these satiric themes find parallels elsewhere in Lindsay's work.¹² There is irony, of course, in the presentation of Kitte, in her theologically correct attitudes and especially in the depth of her learning, as contrasted with the ignorant and corrupt churchmen. But, aside from this broad situational irony, the initially ridiculous humour is supplanted by straightforward denunciation balanced by proper doctrine. The dialogue gives way to monologue. With the exception of one final aside (77-78), the curate simply vanishes from the poem, having played his symbolic part. And from line 95 to the poem's conclusion even this limited fictional pretence is dropped. That is, Kitte likewise disappears, and in his own voice the poet carries on an extended polemic on proper religious form that reveals a distinct anti-Catholic bias (e.g. "the Paip, the Antechriste," 108). The comic tone has long since ceased, and even the mimetic setting dissolves as Lindsay hammers home his religious message. "Kitteis Confessioun," which begins with a real comic potential, runs rather quickly off the rails of humour, becoming merely a verse harangue. This pattern of thwarted promise, of raising expectations which remain unfulfilled, occurs frequently in Lindsay's sat-

12. For example, clerical licentiousness is attacked in Ane Satyre (2016, 2757), Papyngo (885-91), and The Monarche (4692-4708); ignorance of Latin and ecclesiastical duties generally in Papyngo (838-40, 976-82, 1039-43) and Ane Satyre (3125-52, 3865-88); the abuses associated with pilgrimages in The Monarche (2653-68, 2675); and the sacrament of confession in The Monarche (4361-70).

ires.

The two poems of main interest to this discussion of his satiric mimetic transcripts are the mock-confession/complaints, The Testament and Complaint of the Papyngo and The Complaint and Confession of Bagsche. In both poems favourite court pets, on the point of death or exile, are made to reflect moralistically on their lives and speak commonplaces about the fickleness of Fortune and the world's sadly transitory nature for the benefit of their fellows. The court moralizing and ecclesiastical satire in these poems are themes common to Dunbar's work, among others. But in theme and tone the poems bear more of a resemblance to serious testaments like Henryson's Testament of Cresseid or even Lindsay's later testament in Squyer Meldrum than to obviously comic and parodic works like Le Grand Testament de Villon or Dunbar's bogus, macaronic "Tesment of Maister Andro Kennedy." This is perhaps explained by the fact that the testament and complaint forms are essentially tragic modes, like Cresseid's testament containing complaints against Fortune and doleful warnings to other mortals uttered at the moment of extreme unction, a time when absolute truth is called for.¹³ Unlike Villon or Dunbar, who deflate the seriousness of the mode with absurdly low matter and earthy wishes in the testament, Lindsay retains the serious content of the complaint on Fortune. These two poems, then, are only broadly comic, dependent to some extent on ironic episodes but for the most part on the mock-heroic tone created by the discrepancy between the lowly speakers and the high subject matter and style.

13. The papyngo spells out this religious convention explicitly. Cf. lines 619-21: "Traist weill, my freindis, this is no fenzeit fare: / For quho that bene in the extreme of dede, / The veritie, but doute, that sulde declare."

Another potential inspiration for these poems lies in the canon of John Skelton, poet laureate of Henry VIII. Skelton's work did not become generally available until the 1560's, and so we cannot know whether or not Lindsay was aware of his work. But Skelton wrote an exceedingly exaggerated mock-lament for a dead pet sparrow, Phillip Sparrow (1508), and a potent anti-Wolsey court satire masking himself behind the persona of the court parrot in Speak Parrot (1519-20).¹⁴ Skelton in his turn seems to have been influenced by the early Flemish humanist Jean Lemaire de Belges (1473-?1528), whose similar Épistres de l'Amant Vert (1505) was popular in the courts of northern Europe for the first quarter of the sixteenth century.¹⁵ Lindsay, exploring conventional themes, has combined the two kinds of animal poems, testament and satire in the mouth of a "courtier"-pet. The idea of doing so may have occurred naturally to him, for as he says in the prologue to The Testament of Papyngo, "sen I fynd non vther new sentence, / I shall declare, or I depart 3ow fro / The complaint of ane woundit Papyngo" (61-63). It seems unlikely that he did not know of the work of Skelton, Lemaire, or both; but as their works and Lindsay's bear little more than general resemblances to each other,¹⁶ we cannot tell. Certainly Lindsay's work

14. The Complete Poems of John Skelton, ed. Philip Henderson, (London: 1931), 59-97 and 259-81, respectively.

15. Gordon Kipling, The Triumph of Honour, (The Hague, The Netherlands: 1977), 24-28.

16. Janet M. Smith, The French Background to Middle Scots Literature, (Edinburgh & London: 1934), 135-36, notes that Lemaire's poem "is a gallant compliment [to Margaret of Austria] in the courtly tradition; Lindsay's is an admonition to his king and a satire against the greed of priests and the abuses of the confession [in Papyngo]." Kipling, op. cit., 27-28, suggests that the domestic simplicity of Phillip Sparrow deliberately contrasts with the amour courtois sophistication of Lemaire's Green Lover; that "both the English and Burgundian laureates use the same devices and rely upon the same sources (Ovid and Statius), but they employ them to achieve quite different effects. The near-parody of the dirge chanted for

stands a favourable comparison with Skelton's and even Lemaire's efforts in the genre.

Lindsay's first trial of the form, The Testament of Papyngo, is the richer and more elaborately structured of his two poems. But though set in a narrative framework, only two of its five sections forward any action. Its five divisions are the prologue, the complaint against Fortune of the fallen papyngo, its first and second epistles, and the debate of the birds culminating in the papyngo's death and macabre dismemberment. The prologue is a traditional authorial apology setting the subject. In it, Lindsay praises most of the renowned past poets "in our Inglis rethorick" (24), and, lamenting that they have already exploited the best themes and eloquent style, justifies his own choice of subject and stylistic level:

Uharefor, because my mater bene so rude
Off sentence, and of Rethorike denude,
To rural folke myne dyting bene directit,
Far flemit frome the sycht of men of gude.

(64-67)

Despite this explanation, we must presume that the poem was intended for a courtly audience.¹⁷ The papyngo's death, his theme, will be

Phillip Sparrow contrasts sharply...with the touching sophistication of Lemaire's epistle."

17. Lindsay, however, maintains this fiction of aiming at a "rural" audience, commanding the "rude" book to "mak no repair quhare Poetis bene present" (1178) and to avoid the company of nobles, directing it instead to "clame kynrent to sum cuke" and finally "mansweiring" it altogether (1181-85). Except for section five, the Papyngo's death, the poem's messages are almost wholly intended for a courtly audience; but it is one indication of how unsure Lindsay was of the book's reception by James V, that it was indeed a new and risky venture. It is also worth noticing that though Lindsay was a courtier-poet, he addressed his work to a general audience as well as a noble one. His poems, printed in his lifetime and collected in 1568 by Henry Charteris, were often reprinted; and, with the Bible, became a familiar fixture in many Scottish homes, especially those of the humbler classes, who took Lindsay's dedications to heart in the following two centuries.

"rural" or "rude," i.e. low. But in fact his style--hardly denuded rhetoric--will be higher than is appropriate for his animal-fable matter, essential to a mock-heroic tone. He further adds a curious caveat, claiming that when "cunnyng men" disparage the poem as unworthy he will "sweir I maid it bot in mowis, / To landwart lassis quhilks kepith kye & 3owis" (71-72). With perhaps unintentional humour, he has carried the humility topos in a new direction, possibly to new depths.

The papyngo's first epistle addresses James V, admonishing him to practice the behaviour proper to a true prince and pointing out the lessons of history, that fifty-five previous Scottish kings (including his own father) have been slain "in thair awin misgouernance" (325). The longer second epistle addresses her fellow courtiers, reiterating mutability themes along the traditional lines ("Make in 3our remembrance, / Ane Myrrour of those mutabiliteis," 521-22), likewise supplying appropriate "tragic" examples from recent history, including, curiously, Cardinal Wolsey (570-83). As the prologue and epistles are neither tales nor comic, but sobering chronicle and sermon, they need not detain us.

The final section, the debate between the birds satirizing apostate practices among the clergy, is of chief interest. The papyngo's fall and complaint, involving her fatal accident, is comic only in tone, its mock-heroic exaggerations in according a mere bird the dignity proper to a noble courtier. The real world of the court and the symbolic world of the fable are incongruously mixed and confused. There

Lindsay's popularity, of course, became proverbial; and he was the "one Scottish poet before Burns who reached all classes, and reached them in a long series of editions unequalled by any other poet before the close of the eighteenth century" (Hamer, Introduction, xlii).

is a comic disparity between the subject and treatment in the poet's deferential addresses to the bird ("Sweit bird, I said, be war, mont nocht ouer hie / ...Thov art rycht fat, and nocht weill vsit to fle," 157-59), and, as in conventional chanson d'aventure, his creeping behind a hawthorn brake to record its absurdly long final moments (187-89). There is also a comic interaction of worlds when the hurt bird cries out for a priest (170)--an incongruous human reference, a technique familiar from Henryson's Morall Fabillis (2895)--only to get three bad ones from the bird kingdom preying on their fellow creatures; and in the papyngo's view of itself as a symbolic figure overthrown in her pride by Fortune (192-95) when in fact she has simply fallen from a tree. The poem works as a patchwork of tragic conventions incongruously applied to an inconsequential animal.¹⁸

This mock-heroic tone is later modulated toward a broad and heavy satiric irony when the birds debate, though Lindsay sustains the comic animal-human disparity by symbolically equating carrion birds with "Religious men, of gret deuotioun" (666). Lindsay often compares errant clergymen unfavourably with beasts; as here, he equates them with scavenging birds of prey in Ane Satyre (2751), or describes them as "hungre gormand wolfis" among "Christis scheip" (Papyngo 995-96, Ane Satyre 3037, The Monarche 5931), or, vilifying their unchastity, likens them to "rams rudlie in thair rage...among the sillie 3owis" (Ane Satyre 2764-65, The Monarche 4706-4707).

The "Channoun" magpie, the "black Monk" raven, and "holy freir" vulture are, characteristically, religious hypocrites. Lindsay's em-

18. Lindsay acknowledges the tragic mode, concluding "Now haue 3e hard this lytill Tragedie, / The sore complent, the testament, & myschance / Off this pure Bird, quhilk did ascend so hie" (1172-74; my italics).

phasis is on their outward show, juxtaposed ironically against their selfish and unChristian motivations. They hold up meaningless tokens as (false) symbols of their purity and holiness: "my quhyte rocket my clene lyfe doith declare" (656); "The blak Bybill pronounce I sall perqueir" (672). They "fenzzeit...to greit" and "contrafeit gret cair" (648, 663) at the papyngo's plight solely in the hope she will endow them with her worldly goods: "I thynk 3our gudis naturall / Sulde be submyttit hole in to my cure" (658-59).¹⁹ Their faked concern and false persuasions do not continue lone, however, before the dubious papyngo ("Howbeit 3our rayment be religious lyke, / 3our conscience, I suspect, be nocht gude," 676-77) begins a serious criticism of ecclesiastical abuses, much in the manner of "Kitteis Confessioun." She "prechis" (1060)--the word is the gled's and it is not too strong--a lengthy diatribe against the religious orders, carefully making no presumptuous judgments herself but claiming to report only "the vulgare pepyllis Iugement" (758-65). Many of the themes encompassed in her charges against the clergy, such as their insatiable lust (860-69, 1062-64), exemption from the law both civil and consistory (720), even the allegorical rejection of Dame Chastity by the holy orders on the ironical grounds that she is a "Rebell out of Rome" (871-925), receive substantial development in Lindsay's other works.²⁰ The papyngo's detailed intelligence of ecclesiastical matters (wherein she leaves the

19. Here Lindsay ridicules clerical hypocrisy and greed (678-81); in Ane Satyre he expresses outrage at their heartless and cruel imposition of death-duties (1971-2022, 2823-24).

20. Compare, for example, Ane Satyre lines 508 and 2757-61 (and The Monarche 4690ff.), 3627-42, and 1197-1263 on clerical lust, exemption, and Dame Chastity's rejection, respectively. The gled's false, "facunde wordis fair" (669-710) are reminiscent of Flattrie's vocation and speeches in Ane Satyre (740-840).

animal realm altogether) is no more incongruous than her superior abilities at discourse.

Lindsay provides small ironic touches throughout their debate. For example, when accused of stealing a chicken from its mother the raven replies with fox-like ready wit, "that hen was my gude freind, / And I that chekin tuke, bot for my teind" (680-81). Using the highly charged word "preordinate," the gled-friar continues to explain away his predatory activities against the community by calling on the sanction of papal authority, laying the blame in Rome: "be the Pope it is preordinate / That spiritual men suld leue vpon thair teind" (683-84). Later, the gled provides the comically worthless assurance that they shall keep the papyngo's counsel by swearing on his profession (739-41). Or, when the gled asks where Dame Chastity is now the papyngo snaps out a quick retort, "Nocht amang 3ow...I 3ow assure" (916-17). True to tradition, the friars come in for the heaviest criticism.

But on the whole the readers expect, and get, a one-sided, black-versus-white debate, the "good" papyngo well-informed and dominant and the "evil" carrion birds smug but virtually defenceless. They do not deny her accusations, but ironically lay the blame on temporal princes for making inconsidered appointments to religious offices (978-82), and on their own spiritual leaders for setting a wicked example "agane our wyll":

"No maruell is, thocht we Religious men
 Degenerit be, and in our lyfe confusit:
 Bot sing and drynk, none vther craft we ken,
 Our Spirituall Fatheris hes ws so abusit:
 Agane our wyll, those treukouris bene intrusit.
 Lawit men hes, now, religious men in curis;
 Profest Uirgenis, in keipyng of strong huris."
 (997-1003)

As the satire is highminded and argumentative, exposing villainy with

small concern for raising the sustained laughter of ridicule, comic tone is but little evident in the preceding passages. But this hypocritical outcry is highly ironic, especially in its use of specifically religious language functioning almost as puns: "degenerit" recalls "generation," the debased act of generation and more broadly the iniquitous generations of the Old Testament; and "confusit" carries overtones of confusio, the unhappy result of the fall from God's grace. The phrases, the explanations, are comically self-damning even as they attempt to exonerate by placing the blame elsewhere. "Craft" is an ironically inappropriate description to apply to "sing and drynk," parodic activities reminding us of the rites of the Mass. "Agane our wyll," bringing to mind free will, is a false argument; and "treukoris" is hardly justified, as their temporal and spiritual leaders have been anything but "deceivers": they have been openly abusive, as the papyngo has been at pains to explain. The gled's most flagrant--and paradoxical--hypocrisy, however, lies in his protestations against the lay clergy (and he deliberately puns "lawit" with "lay" or "lewd" in the sexual sense), "Profest Uirgenis," who, he claims emphatically, are "keipyng of strong huris." It is the friars themselves, vowed to chastity, who are notorious for sexual abuses; and there is a distinct note of jealousy in his fierce denunciation. The speech, resonant with suggestive religious phrases, blame-fixing, hypocrisy, and patent lies, is singularly comic. And a sardonic, potent irony returns--however briefly--at the moment the papyngo gives up her prepared ghost, itself a pathetic scene not at all intended comically. The scavengers' hypocritical promises are instantly foresworn, for as soon as she expires

The Rauin began rudely to ruge and ryue,
Full gormandyke his emptie throte to feid.

"Eait softlye, brother," said the gredy gled:

"Quhill scho is hote, depart hir wein amang ws.
Take thow one half, and reik to me an vther;
In tyll our rycht, I wat, no wycht dar wrang ws."
The Pyote said: "The feinde resaeue the fouthier!
Quhy mak 3e me stepbarne, and I 3our brother?
3e do me wrang, schir gled, I schrew 3our harte!"
"Take thare," said he, "the puddyingis for thy parte."
(1148-57)

The cannibals squabble comically over the distribution of her still-warm corpse, a savage comment on the clergy's dishonesty and self-interest. Their ironic acts and speeches subtly reveal personality. The wolfishly "gormandlyke" raven vigorously tears into the corpse without a single word; and the gled, continuing in his role as spokesman, reproves him. The gled reveals a self-centred legalistic nature in discussing unchallengable "rycht" and demanding an "ewin" division of the spoils, a division that excludes the magpie who had been first on the scene. The magpie cuts him off with comic abruptness, angrily challenging these "rights" with a blasphemous, scornful: "feinde resaeue the fouthier!" Protesting for an equal share, the magpie's use of "schir gled" is notably ironic, as is his metaphoric play on "stepbarne" and "brother." The gled's rejoinder is fittingly contemptuous. Such bickering among evil characters over their ill-gotten spoils is repeated in Ane Satyre (1552-71), when Falset and Dissait quarrel over the king's stolen strongbox. The birds' dialogue is compact and powerful; and Lindsay makes a rare and effective use of ironic understatement in "Eait softlye, brother." The papyngo's rather touching bequeathals specified in her testament go for nothing. The poem ends with the selfish trio fighting over the possession of her heart, promised to her king (1160-71). The scene is at once pathetic and grotesquely comic, effectively dramatizing in a few stanzas the substance of the satiric debate in the preceding fifty or so stanzas. This is

one indication of how ineffectively the theme-conscious Lindsay has managed his mimetic materials.

The Complaint of Bagsche is apparently a command performance, following up the evident success of The Testament of Papyngo.²¹ It is in many ways therefore a repetition, attempting to recapture the strengths of the earlier poem by recasting its basic formula in a slightly varied pattern. The idea and tone of both poems then are similar. But Bagsche is structurally more compact than Papyngo, although both tend to ramble, as it confines itself to the kind of courtly moralizing found in the papyngo's second epistle. Bagsche, once the king's favourite hound, addresses his successor Bawte and other courtier-dogs; and his moralitas-like warnings are those traditional in a complaint against the vicissitudes of Fortune: "I pray 3ow that 3e nocht pretend 3ow / To clym ouer hie" (109-110); "3our exemple make be me" (125); "Hiest in Court, nixt the weddie" (150); and further variations urging moral vigilance. He laces his recollections of his former greatness at court--greatness based not a little on predatory cruelty (e.g. 35-61)--with exhortations and ethical instructions. As this "tragic" complaint is put in the mouth of a bullying mastiff there is again a comic discrepancy between the subject matter and its poetic handling, resulting in the mock-heroic tone. This is present from the poem's beginning: low-life Bagsche the dog begins his lament in the high style by moaning "Allace, quhome to suld I complayne / In my extreme Necessite?" (1-2).

Serious moralizing, made broadly comic because of the context, again overbalances specifically humorous episodes. But there exist

21. The title page proclaims that the poem was "maid at Command of King Iames the Fyft" (Lindsay, I, 92).

a few scenes comic in themselves, as when Bagsche reveals his jealousy:

For Bawte now gettis sic credence
That he lyis on the kingis nycht gown,
Quhare I perforce, for my offence,
Man in the clois ly lyke ane loun;
(21-24)

or boasts wistfully of his former prowess and ferociousness toward the defenceless:

Quhen I began to bark and flyte
For thare was nouthir Monk nor freir,
Nor wyfe nor barne, but I wald byte;
(38-40)

or humbly begs leave to do penance for his sins, fittingly contrite, only to ironically demolish the sincerity of his repentance with a request for special privileges during Lent:

prouide me ane portioun
In Dumfermeling, quhare I may dre
Pennance for my extortioun.
.
Want I gude fresche flesche for my gammis:
Betuix Aswednisday and Paice,
I man haue leue to wirrie Lambis.
(94-86, 102-104)

The dog's self-pitying and unflattering personal revelations, and his mistaken reasoning (ironic in terms of a real dog) in imputing his fall to wickedness when we know it is due to natural processes, are laughable. Bagsche, remaining in his animal character, comically behaves like a real dog but conceives of himself in human terms, as a courtier. Not a creature from Aesopic fable, Bagsche is a known hound at the real court, yet cast in a symbolic role. Thus the fable-like world of animals as disguised humans and the actual world of the court--where men behave as beasts: "of thy self presume no thing / Except thow art ane brutall beist" (191-92)--blend into one another, different levels of the same existence. When Bagsche warns

And beleif weill 3e ar bot doggis:

Thocht 3e stand in the hiest gre,
 Se 3e byte nother lambs nor hoggis,
 (126-28)

the message is ironically double-edged, literally true for real dogs and symbolically appropriate for Lindsay's fellows. The audience intended is a courtly one, without suggestion of aiming at cooks and milkmaids; and the satire is correspondingly subtler than that of The Testament of Papyngo, though both are fable-like allegories. Bagsche represents the corrupt courtier--guilty of pride, "extortioun," ingratitude, and abuse of power--whose inevitable fall and punishment are just. Lindsay's auditors must have listened uncomfortably as they recognized the unflattering comparison being made between men and court pets, and the catalogue of courtiers' vices. When Bagsche addresses his fellow dogs, recounting his ungratefulness (53-56) or warning that the reward of cruelty and pride is to suffer the same from others and be rightly punished ("euey bouchour dog doun dang me," 69; "His Maieste wyll tak no rest / Tyll on ane gallous he gar hang hym," 135-36, an incongruous panegyric note), his words are appropriately in character but carry an ironic double meaning for those erring courtiers in the audience.

On the whole, both The Testament of Papyngo and The Complaint of Bagsche are aesthetically dissatisfying. Like "Kitteis Confessioun," they are models of the strategy of the preacher, using humour to draw an audience into the solemn message which follows at length. Humour is also employed periodically to enliven that audience, and to sharpen an example or idea. This sermon-like comic technique earns a measure of success. But this technique is less satisfying as an artistic strategy because the serious message could be better accommodated within the structure of a satiric story. The sermon exists before-

hand, and the mimetic setting is constructed, albeit cleverly, for the simple purpose of clothing the polemicist's text. In short, they are not organic textures but mechanical forms.

These poems embrace neither the rich intellectual complexity and warm human understanding of Henryson's Morall Fabillis nor the technical ingenuity and wild satiric delight of Dunbar's "The Wowing of the King." The poems are situational mimetic transcripts of complaints, built largely of setpieces dictated by tradition but unaccompanied by other action. The transcripts contain comic reversals, but change in the agents' circumstances--an expected fall from felicity to misery--has already occurred (Bagsche) or comes about accidentally to the underserving (Papyngo); it does not result from the agents' moral choices or judgmental errors. The poems also lack unity in that, for example, the epistles or a number of the speeches or parts of them could be re-ordered, even removed, and not seriously damage the whole structure. The poems, without unity or peripeteia, are not proper stories; nor are the agents fully realized characters--from whose choices the plot develops--but monochromatic, unchanging figures constructed largely from fable conventions. They merely serve as mouthpieces for particular sentiments and argue limited points of view. The effective patterning of caricatures can produce very successful comedy, and render the work of art's moral message(s) in a strong and delightful manner. But an effective mimetic patterning is lacking in Lindsay's mock-confession poems. Lindsay's variation of the fable genre, like those of Lemaire and Skelton, is an interesting development. However, his pedestrian conventional themes are so time-worn, over-stressed, and repetitious (in the works themselves and in other works such as Ane Satyre) that any sense of originality, of freshness, is soon under-

mined. If his agents are flat and his satiric message too soberly and at times clumsily handled, Lindsay's language is rarely inspired as well. Attempts at wit appear as small oases occasionally dotting great deserts of didactic verse. Verbal play--such as the comic innuendos of "Kitteis Confessioun," the odd pun (Bagsche was "houndit of the toun," 144), or ironic understatement ("Eait softlye, brother," said the gredy gled)--is discouragingly rare. As a result, the comic tone, necessary to sustain long satiric poems, is frequently in danger of vanishing. Once Lindsay's unusual narrative premise is established there are no further surprises, no original twists given to the traditional material, and few memorable flourishes of rhetorical excellence. Agreeable surprise is a major element of both humour and aesthetic satisfaction.

Lindsay's "Iusting Betuix Iames Watsoun and Ihone Barbour"²² falls in the tradition of burlesque tournaments between ignoble contestants. Along with "Sym and His Bruder" and Alexander Scott's Vp at the Drum that Day, it takes its place as a descendent of The Tournament of Tottenham and the mock-tournament of Dunbar's Fasternis Evin in Hell. The satire is unusual for Lindsay in that it seems to have been written purely for reasons of entertainment. Certainly he mocks the ungente, unskilled lower classes, represented by two real servitors of James V; but otherwise his satire carries no overtly didactic message. He intends simply to amuse the court, and the poem was probably com-

22. Hamer (Lindsay, III, 140-41) argues from historical evidence the likelihood of 1539 or 1540 as the date for which the poem was intended. As Dunbar used Curry, Norny, Doig, Musgrave, and other real court personages as comic characters in poems, so Lindsay uses the names of real people, providing a courtly audience comic piquancy. It is not known whether he burlesques an actual contest between these two or simply invents one.

missioned for a particular occasion.

The "Iusting," however, does little to redeem his reputation as a non-dramatic comic artist, for the poem, while an amusing and adequate production, is not unusual or special in the genre. Lindsay again draws heavily on traditional material without attempting to revitalize it. He does exhibit a greater sense of mimetic propriety in the "Iusting" than in those satires we have previously examined, making good use of dialogue, drawing vivid action scenes, and focussing closely on episodic development. The contrast of compactness and unity with some of his other work is strong. But though he observes decorum as he seldom does elsewhere, this is not to automatically make the "Iusting" a superior poem.

The "gentill" combatants are not of course gentlemen at all but "cubicularis" of the king's chamber (11-12). They are incompetent at handling weapons ("His speir did fald amang his horssis feit," 24, 38). Masking fear with bravado they swear mighty oaths and boast idle boasts (27-32), absurd in the face of their cowardice and ineptitude. There is no bloodshed because of their clownish incompetence, no real threat of pain to disrupt the comic tone with a serious emotion. Rather, ironically, near the end of their engagement both cry "Red the men" when tired out (60-61), the cry used by onlookers to separate knights in danger of killing one another. Not only is it the province of spectators to take that decision, neither man is in any danger of injury in combat.²³ Like Dunbar's tradesmen, Lindsay's fighters soil themselves in fear and so break up the joust because of the offensive

23. Compare Ane Satyre (1553-71), wherein the ignoble Falset and Dis-sait comically battle over a stolen strongbox. Falset, injured, cries "Walloway, will na man red the men?" Lindsay only uses the phrase ironically, in the context of ignoble cowardice.

smell (66-67). The parallels are not exact, but all of these elements are in Dunbar's poem, and Lindsay's efforts mark no improvements of any kind. He stresses gross incompetence where Dunbar emphasizes scatological humour.

Lindsay exploits the ridicule and situational irony common to satiric spoofs. The agents' behaviour is absurd in itself: they pretend to activities reserved for the trained noble classes, and fail utterly. The satire vindicates the existing social order. Irony is his other comic technique. The expectations of a serious joust are systematically reversed, thus lampooning the participants as compared to the ideal.²⁴ Lindsay sets the ironic tone from the first few lines:

In Sanctandrois on Witsoun Monnunday,
Twa Campionis thare manheid did assay,
Past to the Barres, Enarmit heid and handis.
Wes neuer sene sic Iusting in no landis.

.
Mony ane Knicht, Barroun, and baurent
Come for to se that aufull Tournament.
(1-4, 7-8)

This could be taken literally as the beginning of a noble tournament, until we discover the identity of the "campionis" trying their manhood in combat. Then the terms *campion*, *aufull*, and "gentill Iames" (9) take on ironic meaning; and the phrase "Wes neuer sene sic Iusting" reveals itself as *litotes*, comic understatement. Lindsay throughout makes use of verbal incongruities, such as deflationary comparisons

24. For a comparison with an ideal combat, see the romance-like tournament in *Squyer Meldrum* between Meldrum and the English champion Talbart (372-90, 430-570). Between two skilled heroes accident plays a prominent role in deciding the outcome ("sic was his hap," 471, or "Bot Talbartis Hors, with ane mischance...to rin was laith," 506-507). Talbart has a clear and serious reason for blaming his steed and demanding another before making a final run (515-21). In the "Iusting" apparent accidents all result from ineptitude. Thus it is absurd when Iames's unsuccess is blamed on "falt of swordis" (56).

("Hobland lyke Cadgeris rydand on thare creillis," 20, or "than ran thay to, lyk rammis," 34); comic insults ("Full womanlie thay weildit speir," 18, "thy braunis be lyk twa barrow trammis," 33); and comic misdirection, setting up expectations in the reader's mind and comically thwarting them in the following line (e.g. "Iames had bene strykin doun / Wer not that Ihone for feirsnes fell in swoun," 35-36, or "Thare hors, harnes, and all geir wes so gude, / Louyng to God, that day was sched no blude," 67-68). Unhappily, in a short poem, certain effects apparently struck Lindsay as good enough to repeat almost verbatim (cf. lines 25-26 with 35-36; or 24 with 38 and 42). In romance jousts knights shatter lances against one another (as in Squyer Meldrum, 451, 530), and it is comic that Iames breaks his spear instead by fouling it in his horse's feet; but it is not an effect that bears repetition. The poem is a competent recycling of old themes and comic strategies, but on the whole seems uninspired and sapped of vitality, a light occasional poem. This lacklustre handling of traditional material seems more attributable to Lindsay's personality, abilities, and concerns than to some final decay in medieval poetic traditions.

Lindsay's "Iusting" is not a tale but a mimetic transcript. The action is determined not by choices made and carried out by the agents but by a series of accidents, determined by their want of skill, within a given situation. There occurs no unexpected reversal of fortune, no emotional change, and so no peripeteia exists. The combatants are named and identified, yet remain anonymous, neither clear-cut caricatures nor even distinguished from one another to any appreciable degree. Lindsay uses the technique of pitting two antagonists against one another about whom we are emotionally neutral as spectators. Unlike Squyer Meldrum, no audience identification with the characters is

possible. The principle agents do not have a protagonist-antagonist relationship, as a story would require, but are two equally ridiculous antagonists battling for reasons known only to themselves. In a story their motivations would be clear and one would triumph over the other, with tragic or happy consequences depending on whether or not the protagonist was victorious. Here neither agent may be identified with the protagonist's role: both are equally foolish, matched in stupidity and clumsiness, and the audience is equally indifferent to them. We do not care who wins. Our attention is on the action itself, devoid of emotional content, and we feel that the outcome is inconsequential. Lindsay ridicules Watsoun and Barbour with verbal incongruities and a mock-heroic tone, and through an ironic contrast between ideal behaviour and the foolish reality. For greatest comic effect both must be equally ridiculous and fail equally ignobly. Yet a kind of protagonist-antagonist relationship is established between the spectators and the subject: the characters' increased ridiculousness enhances our self-esteem. It is the factor creating the satiric distance, enabling one social group to look down on another.

The "Iusting," like most of Lindsay's satires, is court-centred and of topical interest. It is impossible to prove, but I suggest that the satire would be more humorous if we knew who Watsoun and Barbour were. In keeping with the mock-heroic tone Lindsay specifies their noble calling ("cubicularis") and, probably ironically, praises their qualities--praise noteworthy for the absence of any knightly traits:

Iames was ane man of greit Intelligence,
 Ane Medicinar, ful of Experience;
 And Iohne Barbour, he was ane nobill Leche,
 Crukit Carlingis he wald gar thame get speche.

(13-16)

But why should they "try their manhood?" "3it for our ladyis saikis,"

as Iames says to Iohne (39), or is that merely a comic device, imitating knightly combat at all points (as in Sguyer Meldrum, 484)? Lindsay does not explain the nature of their rivalry, or why they should choose to settle a mysterious disagreement in the lists. Neither does he hint anything personal about them, whether they were meek or aggressive, puny or strong, old or young, or comically an odd match on any of these grounds. Doubtless the circumstances and personalities involved were known to the court, and Lindsay did not need to bother with such explanations. But outsiders are given no clue why a fight between these two--except that they pretentiously imitate the noble classes--should be particularly funny. Dunbar's tradesmen in the "Tournament" of Fasternis Evin in Hell similarly are not distinguished clearly from one another, but they are at least emblematic of the lower classes, representatives of bourgeois pretension; and we know their motives, that they are forced into the lists to prove themselves worthy of the knighthoods bestowed by Mahoun. Hence their reluctance, cowardly incontinence, and relief at failure. Lindsay provides the "Tusting" with neither symbolic valuations nor illuminations of character and motive, cutting it off from heightened comedic appreciation and a more universal audience.

Indeed, Lindsay's satires all suffer from being highly topical in nature. A broader satire attacks vices which afflict people generally and which are universally deplorable, such as lust, hypocrisy, greed, selfish ambition, and the legion of personality defects. Lindsay instead ridicules particular people or groups with vicious traits and not the vices themselves. He exposes lust or hypocrisy in the clergy, or abuse of power in courtiers, but not lust, hypocrisy, or power abuse as evils in mankind generally. When Dunbar castigates the

medieval marriage system in general and predatory female luxuriousness in particular in his Tretis, or religious hypocrisy in the "Tway Cummeris," he touches on human frailty at large and reaches out to a universal audience. When he descends to topicality and humiliates Doig, Curry, Norny, or the Blak-Moir he is much less amusing. As outsiders we neither know nor care about these individuals, and consequently find such squabbling dull, if not petty and mean-spirited. Lindsay is always topical in his poetry. He leads assaults on particular groups and social systems. But if we do not share his Reformation concerns, if we do not care about seeing his viewpoint prevail, then interest collapses in his satiric point, especially as he makes spare use of comic narrative techniques. He is much like Sempill in this regard, without the rabidness. His enemies are of his time and society, not the enemies of mankind as a whole. His poetry is aimed at a closed community, and will necessarily have a limited satiric thrust of rapidly diminishing power. If it is a commonplace to observe that the best satire is universal, Lindsay at least affords an excellent illustration of the obverse of that principle.

Chapter Seven

MINOR POEMS

We have now examined the major modes of humorous verse-stories and mimetic transcripts extant in Middle Scots--fable, fabliau, parody, satire. It remains for us to look at the minor and special category works available. Of the remaining titles under present consideration all but two are located in either the Bannatyne MS. or the Maitland Folio MS., or both;¹ and, excepting the attributions to James I (whose authorship of Christis Kirk of the Grene and possibly Peblis to the Play is very much a matter of debate), most of the poems are anonymous or by poets, such as Clerk or Lichtoun Monicus, about whom little or nothing is known apart from the name.² As such, these poems cannot be reliably dated other than generally from the late-fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries, the manuscript dates (1568-86) providing a broad terminus ad quem; or in the case of "The Ballad of Kynd Kittok," publication in 1508.

Further, with authorship and date unknown, it is difficult to posit the audience intended for the poems, to assert setting and purposes. Some poems seem obviously related to the literary traditions of the

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1. The Roman numerals after the poems listed below refer to their numerical order in these MSS. The two exceptions are "The Ballad of Kynd Kittok," in Bannatyne (III, 10) and Pieces from the Makculloch and the Gray MSS. together with the Chepman and Myllar Prints, ed. George Stevenson, STS 1st Ser. 65, (Edinburgh & London: 1918); and "The Fermorar and His Dochter" (see below, note 3).
 2. Two poets included here are exceptions to this anonymity, Sir George Clapperton (d. 1574) and Alexander Scott (?1515-?1583). For their biographical sketches and historical background see John MacQueen, Ballattis of Luve, (Edinburgh: 1970), Introduction, xxxiii-iv, and xxxv-xliv, respectively.

court; for example, chansons d'aventure such as "I Met My Lady Weil Arrayit" or peasant-brawl poems such as Peblis to the Play that poke fun at the antics of the ungente lower classes. But some of the poems apparently convey bourgeois themes, such as "Kynd Kittok," concerning an alewife; or folk and peasant themes, as in "The Wowing of Iok and Iynny," a comic tocher-gud debate among rustics. Yet it is improbable that these poems were intended to entertain one class of society exclusively, that "courtly" poems--if such they are--would find no popular appeal, or vice versa. After all, the comic peasant-brawl poem, and related folk holiday fair, is a tradition that carried down through Fergusson's Leith Races and Burns's Holy Fair, and even the late Robert Garioch's satiric contemporary imitation Embro to the Ploy. Because class barriers have never been as greatly pronounced or as exclusive as those in richer neighbouring countries, the poetic traditions of Scotland remained relatively democratic. A superior narrative viewpoint, intellectually, morally, or both, does not necessarily imply a class distinction between the narrator and his subject.

Because we must speculate about milieu and intentions, and cannot accurately know whether the poems preceded or followed or co-existed with the work of Henryson, Dunbar, or Lindsay, the poems then form a kind of mosaic background against which to view the age's major figures. The extant sampling is admittedly small, but the poems are a measure of the literary climate of the times.

These minor poems may be grouped into three main categories. The first, and perhaps most conventional, category is Love and Domestica, poems whose subjects are comic love-trysts and marital strife. Included here are "Ane Fair Sweit May" (Maitland LIV), "I Saw Me Thocht This Hindir Nycht" (Bannatyne CCX), "I Met My Lady Weil Arrayit"

(Bann. CCIX), "The Fermorar and His Dochter,"³ "The Wowing of Iok and Iynny" (Bann. CCI), Clapperton's "Wa Worth Maryage" (Mait. LXXIX), and "God Gif I Wer a Wedo Now" (Mait. LXXX). The second group consists of peasant-brawl poems, Peblis to the Play (Mait. XLIX) and Christis Kirk of the Grene (Bann. CLXIV, Mait. XLIII). Also included are two peasant-joust poems, the apparently incomplete ecclesiastical satire, "Sym and His Bruder" (Bann. CCXVII), and Alexander Scott's The Iusting and De-bait Vp at the Drum (Bann. CXCI). The third category is made up of comic fantasy, especially "eldritch" fantasy, poems,⁴ in which the wildest imaginings are unleashed. These include "How the First Heland-man of god was Maid" (Bann. CCXXX), "The Ballad of Kynd Kittok" (Bann. CXCVII), "King Berdok" (Bann. CCVIII), "The Gyre Carling" (Bann. CXCIX), "Lord Fergus' Ghost" (Bann. CLXXVI), "I Yeid the Gate Wes Nevir Gane" (Bann. CCXXI), and "Lichtoun's Dreame" (Bann. CLXV, Mait. XLVIII). To a large extent the poems in these groups are traditional, with the latter two categories being particularly associated with Scotland.

By various unknown hands, the work is of varying quality, often lesser achievements than the poetry of the best known makars. Some poems, for example Peblis to the Play or "Kynd Kittok," exhibit considerable skill in composition; only a few poems, such as "Lord Fergus' Ghost" or "I Yeid the Gate Wes Nevir Gane," are obviously of an

3. David Laing, ed. Select Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of Scotland, rev. W. Carew Hazlitt, 2 vols., (London: 1895), I, 112-15. Laing notes that "the editor found it written on the fly-leaf of an ancient copy of Wyntoun's 'Chronicle,' which appears to have formerly belonged to the Abbey of Cambuskenneth." He dates the poem as "certainly not later than the reign of James V."

4. The term "eldritch" is borrowed from C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama, (Oxford: 1954), 71.

inferior stamp, technically and intellectually. But an overall "low" effect is enhanced by subject matter and rhetorical styles which are invariably middle to low, appropriate to satire and comic play. Also contributing are the poem's characters, ignoble literally (base-born) and as personalities.

Frequently characterization is not developed but dependent on stereotypes handed down by tradition. Stereotypes are a valuable form of shorthand in comic poems, especially in mimetic transcripts, which as a rule do not explore character but rely on ridiculous caricatures. All a poet need do is call up a stock figure of fun, such as an irascible miller or fashion conscious milkmaid, and he provides his audience an immediately recognizable character-type, simultaneously suggesting a set of conventional comic expectations. The poet may then fulfil these expectations, comically turn them on their head, or otherwise vary them, according to his particular needs. Because they are stereotypes they often require only the barest possible references, perhaps the mention of an occupation or a few descriptive words. Thus the young woman engaged in a tryst in "I Saw Me Thocht This Hindir Nycht" is described simply as a "madin bricht" (2). "Bricht" is a term from romance literature for a love-worthy heroine; yet, though still conveying the idea that she is a pretty lover, in a pastourelle context the use of a romance term, with its ennobling associations, ironically calls up the disparity between lower class origins and fine amour pretensions. We do not know whether she is tall, blond, curvaceous, or well-dressed; but "bricht" creates in us certain images and expectations.

The characters' foolish deeds and gross animal behaviour stand as the main comic emphasis in these poems. Verbal play and wit tend to

be employed sparingly. None of the poems have a deliberately appended moralitas. This is typical of non-allegorical comic literature, and gives the impression of poetry made simply to entertain. But most of the works are satiric or parodic, and so, to a greater or lesser extent, can be construed as containing some message for the instruction of an audience. The fantasy poems seem to come closest to "pure" entertainments.

Almost without exception, these poems are not stories but mimetic transcripts, allied to the tradition of Dunbar and the court satirists rather than to that of Henryson and other fabulists and fabliards; though the poems all would have been considered "tales" of some kind in the loose medieval sense. Like Dunbar's work, a number of the poems exhibit the formal techniques of the lyric. Some, for example Peblis to the Play, "Wa Worth Maryage," and "The Wowing of Iok and Iynny," have stanzaic structures and refrain lines which suggest that they were intended for singing, though this is difficult and for present purposes unnecessary to prove. By "lyric" I mean more generally lyric-length (peasant-brawls and others excepted), single-action, and concerned with one emotional effect or limited comic aim. A number of the poems are situational mimetic transcripts, reported dialogues, debates, complaints, and confessions; others are more anecdotal in structure. But for convenience, as with the preceding chapters, terms such as "action" and "character" will be applied to mimetic transcripts as if they were proper stories; such descriptions would not, in the Aristotelian sense, be strictly acceptable.

i. Love and Domestica

"The freaks, and humours, and spleen, and vanity of women, as they embroil families in discord, and fill houses with disquiet, do more to obstruct the happiness of life in a year than the ambition of the clergy in many centuries. It has been well observed, that the misery of man proceeds not from any single crush of overwhelming evil, but from small vexations continually repeated."

-- Samuel Johnson, The Lives of the Poets

All of the poems under this heading are situational mimetic transcripts, either dialogues, debates, or monologue complaints. Moreover, all of the poems in this grouping follow broad and well-established conventional patterns. "Ane Fair Sweit May," "I Saw Me Thocht This Hindir Nycht," and "I Met My Lady Weill Arrayit," for example, are comic chansons d'aventure. They treat of failed love-trysts, and each is reported by an omniscient third-person or observing "I"-narrator, with dialogue the primary vehicle for carrying the action.⁵ Each poem has a refrain line or variant thereof which informs the comic tempo and acts as a wry commentary on the unfolding action. The latter two chansons d'aventure are cast in the same form (five-line tetrameter stanzas rhyming AABAB) as Clapperton's "Wa Worth Maryage," a form also heavily favoured by Dunbar in a host of poems.⁶

5. There is some confusion in "I Met My Lady Weill Arrayit," which begins in the first person ("I met my lady weil arrayit, / I halsit hir all vnaffreyit," 1-2) but switches in the seventh stanza to the third person ("he sayis, 'maistres, I haif gon miss'," 31-32), remaining impersonal then until the poem's conclusion. There could be a mistake in transcription, or possibly, the poet found it prudent not to be equated with the knight who fails sexually. In a poem such as "In Somer Quhen Floris Will Smell" (Bann. CCVI), a straightforward chanson d'aventure in which the lover's encounter is successful ("3our courtly fukking garis me fling!" 47), the "I"-narrator remains constant, casting no aspersions on himself and massaging his ego in what is essentially a locker-room boast of conquest.

6. Cf. Dunbar, poems number 19, 32, 33, 40, 42, 63, 70, 78, 79, 80, 81, and 82. Dunbar uses this metrical form for a variety of purposes, but primarily for petitions and addresses.

All three chansons d'aventure depend for their humour on the motif of male impotence, giving an unexpected comic twist to the traditional love- and lust-affairs of this genre.⁷ The men look to be acceptable lovers, the women are generally compliant, yet at the crucial stage in the proceedings the men fail the test of Venus' work and suffer the scorn of the angry and sorrowful maids. Impotence poems seem primarily intended for an all-male audience, and present an interesting and complex comic psychology. Anyone may suffer impotence, for a variety of reasons. Joking at the possibility of non-performance provides the laughter of superiority, incongruity, and, to a degree, relief, all at the same time. Superior laughter of course dominates, as often the sufferers are bourgeois or lower class, and the tone is one of comic contempt sometimes tempered with delight.

John of "Ane Fair Sweit May" is described as "ane gymp man" (3), a slim and graceful dandy. Yet though attractively "gympy," he does not sweep off her feet the flower-gathering maiden ("yat prowde in paramouris," 4) on their first meeting. True to love's conventions, as the terms for these lovers ironically suggests, she remains coy and "dangerous" (13-16): her refrain line is a variation of "I may nocht byd yow." Nevertheless, she sets up a secret "tryst behind the toun" for the next day (18), on the strength of their two hour acquaintance (7). Amour courtois conventions are ironically employed in a bourgeois setting. Comic haste governs their unsubtle loveplay. Losing no

7. On the chanson d'aventure genre, see Helen E. Sandison, The "Chanson D'Aventure" in Middle English, (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: 1913), 26-65. These poems are more in the French than English mould, interested less in human emotions and the moral issues involved than the narratives and "gross ending" in themselves. Cf. Dunbar's "In Secreit Place." For a straightforward, or at least unintentionally comic, example of the genre compare "In Somer Quhen Floris Will Smell," in Bannatyne, III, 26-27.

speed, John speaks "ffair sweit wourdis...to yat fair, / And grapit hir out throw the gowne" (19-20); his love-talk is contrasted incongruously against his deeds. Excited and comically eager, she chides him impatiently for being slow in "lowsing doun" his points (23-24), reassuring him that they are safe from discovery: "to find ws it may nocht be / Thocht we war with ane sleuthhound socht" (27-28). But though he promises boldly "this werk Richt wyslie man be wrocht" (26), he ironically suffers an embarrassing mechanical failure. He raises himself upon a pedestal from which he is ludicrously overthrown. As she laments:

"Allace, this byding is deir bocht!
ffor schame!" quod scho, "for schame, go hyd 3ow:
I feill 3our lang thing standis nocht!
Now the dewill burne me and ever I byd 3ow."
(29-32)

"Lang thing" is the culmination of the poet's use throughout of comic double entendre (e.g. "ryd yow," "werk"). Her refrain line has reflected her coyness, then her impatience (24), and lastly her angry regret. This final irony is two-pronged, for she takes a comically inappropriate oath that reminds us that lust is one of the Seven Deadly Sins. Her soul is imperilled if she does not abstain from sex with him, yet here she swears the reverse. The comedy revolves around arousing expectations, the maid's and the reader's, that are ignominiously dashed.

This is also the method of "I Saw Me Thocht This Hindir Nycht," in which a squire and a chambermaid go off secretly together "allone to mak the lairdis bed" (5), as the poet euphemistically suggests. These lovers do not imitate the nobility with fine amour loveplay; but, with greater audacity, actually seek to sleep in the lord's bed itself. They too waste little time on preliminaries, and comic haste again

governs the action ("Vntill a chalmer fast thame sped," 3). Yet haste is used here humorously to pull against the squire's growing reluctance, reluctance reflected in his promises on the one hand and his qualifying refrain on the other: "3e suld be myne & pairin laid / And we durst spill the lairdis bed" (8-9; my italics). His false promises are very graphic ("Wald 3e 3our schankis lat me sched / 3e suld be myne," 7-8), as is the comic bawdry of groping her "dounwart 3e wait guhair" and punning "this mowth wald fane be fed" (11-12). But his explicit behaviour and comically lewd language only serves to heighten the incongruity of his sighing hesitations. He is a comic tease, exciting her passion and then denying her physical gratification. Again we see the ironic reversal of lovers' roles, the male coquettish and his partner eager. Like Gympy John, the squire seems to fear discovery, stalling strangely by wishing that they were in another, safer place (21-22), and expressing a loathing to defile her clothes (26-27). This last is the most absurd excuse of all, as her clothing would not be in the way for the activity she has in mind. His cowardly and ridiculous fastidious delaying tactics are quashed in turn with the maid's sensible and increasingly impatient answers. Afforded no escape, he performs badly, and we learn the reason for his prior comic reticence:

Thair wes na bowk in till his breik.
 His doingis wes not worth a leik:
 ffy on him, fowmart, now is he fled,
 and left the madin swownyng seik,
 and durst not spill the lairdis bed.
 (31-35)

The comic bawdry of the squire's words and deeds has given way to the euphemism that there is no bulk in his breeches, a device through which the narrator suggests shame and the squire's just embarrassment. As in "Ane Fair Sweit May," the refrain is used as an ironic comment on the action, finally implying that he "durst not spill the lairdis bed"

actually means that he could not spill it. The two poems have much in common, sharing as they do theme and comic strategies.

"I Met My Lady Weil Arrayit," a somewhat confusing but greatly more sophisticated poem, varies the impotence theme and adds more of the trappings of amour courtois. Where Gympy John and the squire encounter uncomplicated, non-noble "maids" who quickly acquiesce, the lover of this poem meets a "lady" to whom he protests as a loyal fine amour practitioner that he has been her "presoneir." He is enthralled in her "seruice," and claims that her "strangenes" troubles him because, true to tradition, he is "in poynt to de" for want of her love (6-17). Initially, except for her puzzling "on syd" remark, "quhois aw 3one man?" (5), the poem could be taken as a traditional, serious chanson d'amour. But there is a sudden, comic change of contexts when she asks "at ane besyd" (her maid?) with dry sardonic contempt, "Ken 3e 3one man?" (12), pretending not to recognize him. Hers is a magnificently understated world weariness, an impression reinforced when she curbs the lover's whining petitions by rebuking him: "Be still, quod scho, greit not, for schame! / quhat wald 3e, man?" (14-15). The lady is properly dangereuse, but for humorous reasons: far from not recognizing him, she knows him too well, having had a taste of his love already ("I ken 3our wirdis ar fals and sle: / ga glaik 3ow, man," 19-20). We learn the cause of her disgruntlement in a remarkable passage wherein she reproaches the lover:

"Quha is this in my ledder° sa lait?
a strange man gane by the gait?
I schrew 3ow for na gud 3e can!
3e handill me quhill I am hait:
quhair ar 3e, man?"

°skin, pu-
dendum

(26-30)

Obviously he had failed to physically gratify her not long before. Her ironic rhetorical questions are at once supremely contemptuous,

weary, and disgusted. Ironically mistaking her meaning, the lover asks a rhetorical question of his own: "Quhat neidis 3ow gritly for to speir, / feill 3e not me & I so neir?" (31-32). It is an incongruous situation in which the lady finds herself, in control of the lover but not of her own feelings. She knows that she will again be disappointed ("I knaw 3our labour is soft and sweir," 26); but, agitated by the lover's previous heated play, accepts his amends ("maistres, I haif gon miss," 28). That is, despite knowing better, she grants him a second chance to do his will, to get physical relief and satisfaction. She even comically chides him for his dallying explanations when action is desired: "me thocht 3e dwelt to lang, / Now tak all pat evir thair Is: / Be blyth 3ung man" (38-40).

Unhappily, as expected, the knight is inadequate to the task a second time. She complains immediately, "I se 3our labour is all in vane / ...or 3e haif endit 3e wilbe gane" (42, 44). Still punning, the lady scorns him as he rides shamefully away, "me think 3e ar in poynt to soun, / 3e dow nocht, man!" (49-50). The boastful male has comically failed again in his love-tillage, if not actually suffered impotence. Comic double entendres are again in force ("ledder," "labour"), but here a more worldly tone is emphasized. The worldly air matches the sophisticated and subtly portrayed psychological conflict in the lady, her fear of being disappointed and the situation's predictability poised against the desires created in her by the hope that she might be wrong and the urgency of her passion. This is one of the few poems in the genre to adopt the woman's point of view. There is a world-weary resignation in her final ironic remarks, a tone completely absent in the other two chansons d'aventure.

All three chansons d'aventure follow a general structure: the

tryst is engaged; the men cajole their loves with complaints, boasts, promises; vigorous foreplay heats and excites the women to passionate states; and the men fade ignobly at what should be the climax of the quick affair. Accidentally self-defeated, the squire and Gympy John are ludicrous, as are their betrayed women. The knight and lady are more ridiculous, having already experienced his sexual inadequacy and yet electing to try it again. The disappointed women, or in the swooned chambermaid's case the narrator, heap scorn and shame on their limp lovers. Given the sexual content, verbal play--puns and comic euphemism--complements the main focus on comic aspects of the human animal. Lovers missing golden opportunities proved the stuff of comedy for Scots makars like Henryson (Robene and Makyne), Dunbar ("In Secreit Place"), and the poets of these pieces, all of whom deflate the traditional grounds of the chanson d'aventure and provide examples to justify women's complaints of male inadequacy in such poems as The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo.

"The Wowing of Iok and Iynny," "The Fermorar and His Dochter," "Worth Maryage," and "God Gif I Wer a Wedo Now" are all concerned with married life, and all are varieties of verse contentiones, comic conflicts, perhaps descendents of the tenson in Provencal literature. The latter three also begin with traditional chanson d'aventure settings, reporting what a poet has overheard. As situational mimetic transcripts, none of the poems constitutes an action as such, only speeches. The humour arises out of the substance of the dialogue, not out of social interactions which we witness (excepting possibly "Iok and Iynny"). In keeping with these "popular" debates and complaints, the cast of folk characters is still familiar today: the overbearing

mother-in-law, giggling bride, and somewhat shabby future son-in-law; the wilful father versus his headstrong daughter; the complaining wife burdened with a jealous husband; and her counterpart, a husband over-matched with a virago of a wife, respectively. Married life, the yoking of dissimilars, is an age-old subject of comic (and for that matter tragic) conflict. These poems, seeming to be derived mainly from the folk tradition, still owe some allegiance to fabliau conventions, among them the bourgeois settings, the agents' material or emotional selfishness, and the comic treachery involved in battles for marital supremacy, described by Alyce of Bath in terms of household "maistrie."

"The Wowing of Iok and Iynny" is a mimesis of comic marriage-contract negotiations. Charting the courtship of Iok, a yeoman apparently not as well off as the Iynny he woos, it is told from the point of view of the kindred group (possibly by the father of "our Iynny") and set on the occasion of "our feist evin quhen we wer fow" (2). Perhaps drunkenness helps to explain the behaviour of the mother, her daughter, and Iok. He is evidently a welcome suitor to Iynny. When he comes, she prances about like a colt ("brankit fast," 3), and makes herself ready (3-8). Then she plays the silly coquette by comically interrupting the negotiations just as they get started:

"Te he," quod Iynny, "keik, keik, I se 3ow!
Muder, 3one man makis 3ow a mok:
I schrew the lyar full leis me 3ow."
(13-15)

Her absurd, potentially damaging outburst is characteristic of a foolish young woman in a state of love-fevered excitement. Her attempts to appear coy ironically show her up as excessively eager.

Iynny's mother, meanwhile having established the purpose of Iok's visit and gamely ignoring the tittering exclamation, launches into an

extended catalogue of Iynny's "tocher gud" (12), or dowry. She seems prouder of the dowry than of the daughter it accompanies, displaying no apparent interest in her child (e.g. by citing her virtuous qualities or domestic skills) or the prospective bridegroom as she quickly rehearses item after item on her lengthy and jumbled list. It is difficult to decide whether her strategy arises from cunning or stupidity. If cunning, her maternal hard-sell--which seems to reflect blind pride in wealth--may be seen as comically distracting Iok's attention from a girl who giggles stupidly, perhaps cannot cook ("the rost wes twche," 79), and obviously is no prize. But her technique more likely arises from comic ignorance. That is, her list is insubstantial. It contains very little of value and much that is worthless or damaged: for example, "ane pin" (20), "ane fork" (22), "ane rowsty quhittill" (29), "ane caird wantand ane naill" (31), "ane barrow with ane quheilband" (34). Because of the poor value of this collection of oddments--including scant livestock, negligible household stuffs, no money, and no heritable land or property--her list probably represents comic pretension, unjustified material pride.

Unintimidated, Iok weds Iynny (37-40). He then endows her with his worldly goods in turn. In doing so, he addresses Iynny's mother, not his new bride, seemingly to reassure her that Iynny will be properly looked after:

"Now deme, I haif 3our bairne mareit.
Suppoiss 3e mak it nevir sa twche,
I latt 3ow wit schoss nocht miskareit."
(41-43)

His choice of "bairne," given Iynny's previous behaviour, is an ironically low description. The poem is told from the family's point of view. Because of this, it is again difficult to tell whether Iok is a good-natured boob, attempting to raise himself in her estimation by

asserting that he is well-provided ("It is weill kend I haif annwch," 44); or whether he is ironically insulting his new mother-in-law by "quitting" her list with a comically formal counter-list of equally odd and useless goods. I suspect the latter: the debate-structure of the poem presents their relationship as one of comic antagonism. The sly irony of "Suppoiss 3e mak it nevir sa twche" seems to foreshadow the matching collection of trifles which follows: "ane crukit gloyd" (45), "fyve fiddir of raggis" (51), "ane spindill wantand ane nok" (54; cf. 31), and so on. His proud recitation comically exaggerates its own worthlessness. Iok is rich enough, apparently a shepherd worth 500 sheep, "ane joly menze" (62-63); but by casually dropping this wealth in amid the junk he comically devalues his livelihood by making it seem to be of no more importance than anything else he names. Among the absurd gear he thinks to include are "Twa lusty lippis to lik ane laiddill" (55; Iynny has two ladles, 27). It is remotely possible that this reference is a bawdy double entendre; likewise reference to his ox-less "pluche": "Withouffin oxin I haif a pluche / To gang to giddir Iynny & Iok" (47-48). If sexual puns, disrespect spices his "answer" to the dowry. Their lists of property seem to challenge one another; and, whether intentionally or not, comically intermix the possibly valuable with the certainly worthless in a confused, indiscriminate heap.

Iok's mother-in-law may be insulted, but feigns to be suitably unimpressed by scornfully suggesting "Quhen 3e haif done tak hame the brok" (78), that is, the broken fragments. Her annoyed description, ironically, is fitting for both lists of endowments. Brok may also be a pun, meaning "profit"; and perhaps even a double pun, on "badger," a possible reference to Iynny's appearance and/or intellectual level.

The final stanza is difficult to interpret, for the dialogue is ambiguous and confused. Iok's exclamation "The rost wes Twche" (79), whether a literal statement or proverbial expression whose meaning is now lost, seems to be a point of contention, perhaps a further insult aimed at the scornful mother-in-law. "Bodin," in the clause "sa wer thay bodin" (79), could mean simply that the couple were "equipped" for marriage--ironic reference to the joining of the two lists--or, punning, "equipped for fighting," indicating that as they leave together the seeds of future combat have been sown early. Lists qua lists are common in both serious and comic medieval poetry;⁸ and much of the humour apart from their contents and the obliquely suggested characterizations lies in Iok's probably mocking, deliberately inadequate attempt to prove with his own catalogue of tocher gud that he is "weill bodin" (74). Time, however, has rendered the contents of the chaotically arranged lists themselves somewhat obscure; and this formal device somewhat tedious.

The daughter of "The Fermorar and His Dochter"⁹ is a wholly different kind of bride. Another matchmaking comedy, the poem depicts a debate between "ane riche fermorar" and his daughter, "tuiching hir merriage" (3-4). The point of contention is his choice of bridegroom. Unlike silly, flirtatious Iynny, eager to be married off irrespective of Iok's wealth or status, this farmer's spirited and firm-minded twenty year old child scorns any match less than a laird. Ironically,

8. For examples of listing as a rhetorical device in serious poetry, compare Lindsay's "Testament" in Squyer Meldrum, lines 50ff., in Lindsay, I, 190-93; or Gavin Douglas's King Hart, lines 25-32, in The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt, STS 4th Ser. 3, (Edinburgh & London: 1967), 141.

9. Laing, op. cit., 112, notes that the poem "is apparently of English composition," yet he does not cite evidence sustaining that belief, though he may well be correct.

she values herself above her father's estimation, and sets her goals accordingly high. She is selfish and free-spirited, proud (befitting a rich man's child), headstrong, and possessed of a taste for nothing but the best and plenty of it. She scorns the life that was good enough for her parents, fearing to "leiff my liff in sklavery" working a farm (11). Marriage to her neighbour Hob Klout--a comic peasant name--would condemn her

To leif like my mothir, in messarie and thrall,
 Servand the swyne, and the oxin in thare stall,
 With ane pare of clamber kynnis clowtit to my hoise,
 No! I will haue ane gentill man in spyte of 3our noise.
 (45-48)

Her father, rather a puppet adversary, is overwhelmed by her as any future mate is likely to be. He dissolves after two feeble speeches, vanishing like the curate in Lindsay's "Kitteis Confessioun." Thereafter the poem gives over to her fantasy-catalogue of what life would be like as a fine gentleman's wife. Her vision is replete with love, not to say lust ("He will halse me, and braise me, and lufe me out of mesour," 41), wealth, and fine clothing (42-45). But hers is a list comic only in its naivety. If the poem is intended in part as social satire, ridiculing the pretensions of the rising middle classes, the satire is so underplayed and diffuse as to be ineffectual. Both characters are mildly ludicrous, but also sympathetic, as the farmer is hopelessly inadequate to his task, and the daughter such a worldly innocent. Their debate is thoroughly one-sided, the victor never in doubt ("3e can nocht compell me to mary one of thois," 13). Relying simply on a clash of wills, the child dominating the parent (which is too common in real life to be much thought incongruous), the poem is at best a light domestic comedy.

Like "The Fermorar and His Dochter," Clapperton's "Wa Worth Maryage" and the anonymous "God Gif I Wer a Wedo Now" belong to the chanson d'aventure genre: they are songs of chance encounters, the scenes and speeches recorded by an out-of-doors "I"-narrator. Once the setting has been established, the poems then become primitive dramatic monologues of complaint. Comic characterizations, as I suggested earlier about all of the poems under present consideration, is at best sketchy and drawn from established types ("I hard ane heynd cheild"; "I hard ane sweit ane"), developing out of the nature of their complaints, their thwarted desires, unfulfilled wishes, and the wrongs that they imagine are committed against them. Their wishes are comic when viewed against a background of social convention. The two poems are specifically chansons de mal mariée, traditional complaints against marriage, expressing in turn the female and male point of view.

"Wa Worth Maryage" is a three-part complaint. The young wife regretfully recollects past joys (6-15), recounts her present misery (16-35), and speculates about a bright future (36-50). The gist of her complaint is that the freedoms she enjoyed as a maiden, and her former promiscuous adventures, have been severely curtailed since she took a husband. The poem's setting, Easter "monunday / Quhen all was gadderit to the play" (1-2), is highly appropriate for rueful musings, a post-Lenten holiday in Spring when young people traditionally engaged in lovers' games. Her song is a sort of memento amare. Enthralled by marriage, she is now excluded from the "sport and play bayth lait and air" (13) that she was wont to enjoy. Sighing forlornly (4), she addresses her lament to the "maidens":

"...3e may haue grit plesance
ffor to do venus obseruance,
Thocht I inclusit be with cair

That I dar nouthir sing nor dance:
wa worth maryage for euirmair."

(6-10)

As a married woman, ironically inconvenienced by her wedding vows, she is hardly able to sneak a kiss with the priest:

"Thus am I bundin out of blis
on to ane churle sayis I am his,
that I dar nocht luik our the stair
Scantlie to gif sir Iohne ane kis."

(16-19)

The phrase "bundin out of blis," misappropriated from theology, is of course ironical. Both comic anti-clericalism and the suggestion of a young wife wishing to follow her natural desires, a familiar scene from fabliau, are deftly portrayed. Closely guarded, she is sexually unhappy, "thirlit," enslaved, to "ane schrew / quhilk dow nothing of chalmer glew, / Off bourding bayth bask and bair" (26-28). Her complaints of being oppressed with a jealous husband who is himself useless at "chamber sport" and "bedroom jesting" are also familiar, echoing the wives of Dunbar's Tretis. Like them, she prays for the freedom to be "ane wantoun ane, / To leir the law of luiffis layr" (37-38); and, also opting for uninhibited promiscuity, promises with the Wedo that no man should die for want of love: "Luiffaris bayth suld heir and se / I suld luif yame yat wald luif me" (46-47). In her disgruntled complaints and wishes the wife is quite traditional, drawing mildly on the common stock of the chanson de mal mariée. She is a model of patience, however, compared to the women of the Tretis, praying for death to free her from bondage (32, 36) but not actively adulterous or noticeably shrewish in return. She is more a ludicrous character, defeated by circumstances and her own passivity, than her husband is a ridiculous one, though the perennial accusation of sexual inadequacy is levelled against him. The poem tamely sympathizes with her plight,

and the satire against women and marriage is somewhat weak. Neither wit nor originality of treatment and message are much in evidence. Yet, though traditional, the poem seems obviously intended for singing, and its neat structure and lyrical vivacity lend it a greater charm and interest than we might otherwise expect it to carry.

"God Gif I Wer a Wedo Now" offers several parallels to "Wa Worth Maryage." The term "wedo" in the title, like "schrew," is applicable to both sexes; and the henpecked plaintiff who evinces this comically homicidal desire for widowhood has been married "scant ane twelf month" (7). Such comic speed is reflected in the tempo of the whole poem. Given the two poems' similarities and their facing-page manuscript positions in the Maitland Folio, it is tempting to see the second poem as deliberately answering the first, if not also penned by Clapperton by way of balance.

The parallels include the en cachette "I"-narrator; the "heynd cheild" moaning and "sighing" (2-3); addressing his lament to the bachelors ("3e tak gude tent quhair yat 3e wow," 6) as she had addressed the maidens; spousal insults, as her "churle" and "schrew" are answered with his "ewill wyff" (4) and "quene" (39), or harlot; his desire for promiscuity were he free to choose ("full weill I culd link me aboute / In all this land bayth fer and near / Off wyffing," 10-12); and the verbal echo in countering her disobedient wish not to accept her husband's "lore" ("Scho list nocht at my layr to leyr," 18). Both poems depend more on incongruous than superior laughter. Yet undue stress need not be laid on the parallel elements, for such material also seems inherent in the form and themes of a male complaint, a chanson de mal marié. Nor is it necessary to do so in pointing out its efficacy as a companion poem.

The eight-line ballad stanza with refrain suggests that "God Gif I Wer a Wedo Now" was also intended for singing. Its structure, however, differs from "Wa Worth Maryage" in that, after the chanson d'aventure introduction is established, the husband fantasizes about future bliss as a "wedo" (9-16), then returns to the present to detail his unpleasant marital reality. Comic emphasis is placed on female promiscuity in "Wa Worth Maryage"; here the comic emphasis is laid on the husband's thorough defeat at his wife's hands. Male sexual freedom was too commonplace, too real, to serve as the centre of humour, whereas a man's impotent attempts to vanquish his more powerful wife, winning back honour and mastery at home, has served comic writers from Terence to James Thurber. The husband is that age-old comic character type, the henpecked spouse. His ruling trait is timorousness, and the substance of his comic matrimonial complaint belongs to the anti-feminist satiric tradition, centering chiefly on her disobedience, quarrelsomeness, and combative physical prowess (13-20). Each attribution of his wife's power ironically comments back on his cowardice, weakness, and failure to rule at home. Notice the exaggeration with which he insults her, "Off sturtsumnes scho hes no peir" (20; my italics), as if comically to explain his lack of success with her by creating a larger-than-life shrew. His wife physically overmatches him, and does not hesitate to engage in domestic brawls ("vpon my hip I haue ane clout," 13). Ironically, the husband is then reduced to using a woman's traditional weapon against her, the tongue--and that out of her hearing. He relies on muttered insults for revenge, saying that she is ugly as well as bad-tempered, a combination neatly suggested in the comic image of her as a sow: "Scho luikis doun oft ay lyk ane sow" (25). Though he comically longs to give his bruising wife a de-

served drubbing ("To ding hir weill It war na syn," 28), he dare not because he will come off worst in a fight:

"...scho raucht me sic ane rout,
 Quhill to the erde scho gart me leyn.
 Suppois my lyf wer oft in doubt
 hir malice I culd nocht refrein.
 Scho garris me murne, I byd nocht feyn,
 And with sair straikis scho garris me sow°; °smart
 Thus am I cummerit with ane quene--
 God gif I wer ane wedo now!"
 (33-40)

Having learned by hard experience the perils of open confrontation, he must content himself with complaining. Impotent, or at least subservient, he is placed in a comically incongruous reversal of the roles expected by social convention of man and wife; combative, she dominates him physically and mentally. As such, in his complaint addressed to the bachelors and the description of the rough-and-tumble domestic brawl, he much resembles Noah in The Towneley Plays.¹⁰ The Wife of Bath, Dunbar's Wedo, and Moffat's Wife of Auchtermwchty provide complementary examples of kitchen bullies. The marital satire, though equally traditional, is more effective than that of "Wa Worth Maryage," for the wife is an active virago and the husband, unconsciously and so comically self-satirizing, admits a grumbling fear of his wife in his forbearance to fight. Both characters are more lively, ridiculous figures. But both poems, portraying women as promiscuous bitches or froward termagants, are essentially misogynistic, and so aim primarily at an all-male audience, whether aristocratic or not.

Indeed, the poems in the Love and Domestica section generally exhibit an anti-feminist bias in which prevails the traditional satiric view of women as dissatisfied sexual predators or domineering house-

10. The Towneley Plays, ed. George England and Alfred W. Pollard, EETS E.S. 71, (London: 1897; rpt. 1966).

hold bullies. Anti-feminism reflects one aspect of the feature that most of the conflict-poems have in common: to greater or lesser degrees their comic structures turn on role-reversals in which men behave as women are expected to, and vice versa; men and women betray the customary behaviour of their "natural" sex-roles; or both in combination. The underlying assumption is that an accepted and distinct set of sex-roles exists; that male social dominance, or at least the expectation of male dominance, exists, if these reversals are to function humorously. In love, men are presumed to have the power to initiate affairs, and must "perform" well in order to prove manhood; women are expected to be chaste and coy, to be wooed and not the wooer, passive rather than actively lustful. In marriage, as in parent-child relationships, men and women are presumed "naturally" to hold a lord-vassal relationship to one another. Thus, when women are openly lecherous, lovers impotent, or men intimidated and cowed by their home-ruling wives and children, social conventions are comically upset and humorous literary conventions fulfilled. Comic anti-feminist elements therefore cut in two directions, ironically revealing men in an equal if not greater negative light, mocking them for failure to govern themselves and their inferiors. Domestic conflicts, arising primarily out of denied wishes or tests of will, are comic only in relation to tradition, either as they fulfil or contravene social mores and expectations. For example, the tenets of amour courtois provide the backdrop of the love-encounters; and this customary system of wooing is tacitly approved insofar as the lust-ridden, clumsy bourgeois practitioners are ridiculed but the practices themselves are not. (In this readers may also see the "natural" hierarchy of society comically being upheld; these poems, except "I Met My Lady Weil Arrayit," display a definite

class bias in that all of the characters are of the lower classes.) To be customary and so acceptable, comic role-reversals ought to achieve logical oppositions, that is, attain "expected" inversions of behaviour, and they should be of small moral consequence lest they depict serious rebellion or perversion. In accord with this, the scale of action should be domestic rather than public. All of these poems, either positively or negatively, heavily depend on and so affirm literary tradition and social convention. Behavioural comedies, they employ a cast of stereotyped, private and so inconsequential agents (public figures and actions are better suited to serious poetry); and they rely on basic incongruities to achieve the laughter of superiority. If viewed as social satires, most of these poems make sport of peasant men and women. Peasant-brawl poems have this in common with them.

ii. Peasant-brawls

The two skilfully wrought peasant-brawl poems are contentiones of a different kind and on a larger scale than the conflict-poems examined above. They involve whole communities, not just one family. They depend for humour mainly on panoramic narrative action and to a lesser extent on ironic monologues or exchanges of dialogue. Peblis to the Play and Christis Kirk of the Grene are not tales but mimetic transcripts, following the actions and changes of fortune and emotion of whole groups instead of individuals. As such, they are diffuse and kaleidoscopic instead of compact in focus, not unified in that certain episodes may be excised or transposed without changing the structures as a whole. The episodes are strung together like loosely related anecdotes. The poems establish no single protagonist-antagonist relationships that carry the narrative but shift attention rapidly from individual to individual in a series of cameos. Hence there can be no

true peripeteia. Yet there is a kind of peripeteia, if a rather strange usage of the term may be permitted, in that unexpected, action-governing reversals of fortune occur for the group as a whole, following broad patterns of movement. The humour hinges on comic deeds, and verbal play is more rare. But character portraits are typically minimal, no more than a name or reference to an occupation, and so comic action does not arise out of who the agents are and what they think as much as out of the behaviour expected of them as stereotypes. They are not individualized characters but general caricatures. In the Bergsonian sense they are for the most part puppet-like, comically mechanical stock figures such as flirtatious wenches, cowardly tailors, or shepherds inept at warfare. They behave automatically, according to fixed principles, no matter what the external circumstances. It is the behaviour-pattern of the community at large which clearly emerges, built out of the common use of stock "types" acting in a given situation, in both cases, rustics on holiday.

The peasant-brawls were a popular fifteenth century genre, evident especially in Germany,¹¹ somewhat in France, and to a lesser extent in England, at that time largely choking on imitations of Chaucer and Lydgate. The Tournament of Tottenham serves as almost the only extant English example of the kind. Such poems are frequently set at a festival time or some other public or social occasion--plays, holiday fairs, weddings--involving movements of an entire community, providing the opportunity for drinking, merry-making, dancing, and contests that develop into massive battles among inept participants, and so battles of deflated seriousness. The spirit of rollicking fun is character-

11. See George F. Jones, "'Christis Kirk,' 'Peblis to the Play,' and the German Peasant-Brawl," PMLA, 68 (1953), 1101-1125.

istic, but so is a satiric tone, conveyed by a higher intellect viewing the scene, possibly from outside their social class. The poems seem to have been written to amuse an aristocratic audience; they invoke the laughter of superiority, even if more gently so in the Scottish examples. Allane MacLaine has suggested that Peblis to the Play and Christis Kirk of the Grene are "aristocratic works, good-natured burlesques of peasant customs and peasant character, written by a conscious and intellectual artist, and addressed to an upper class audience."¹² Peasant-brawl poems mock the lower classes, denigrating--however sympathetically and blurred with speed--peasant clownishness and peasant pretentiousness. Accordingly, none of the stereotype agents come off well: maidens are too forward and inviting; wives are nagging; men foolish or cowardly, no matter how strong and boastful they may have initially appeared. They are excessive and so absurd in everything, their vanities, emotions, follies, physical prowess, their sensitivity or imperviousness to pain, their pretentious imitations of upper class fashions and manners, never striking a believably moderate note that could be taken seriously. All are comically dehumanized, viewed distantly as apes imitating men, animated within limited parameters but apparently without fully developed minds or souls. Thus exaggeration, hyperbole, and not realism, is the vehicle of humour.

Because of the reference to Peebles and Falkland green in the first stanza of Christis Kirk (2-3), it is assumed that Peblis to the Play and a now-lost peasant-brawl poem centred in Falkland green preceded

12. Allane H. MacLaine, "The Christis Kirk Tradition: Its Evolution in Scots Poetry to Burns," SSL, 2 no. 1 (July 1964), 3-18. Jones, op. cit., 1124-25, also strongly argues the case for the poems' aristocratic satire of the lower classes. Their assertions, however, must remain tentative.

it.¹³ No one knows how many such poems once existed, nor their original source(s) of inspiration. Only their enduring popularity is beyond dispute, as the genre survived to Burns's day and even longer. Both poems share a number of the same comic conventions: the satiric intent; an omniscient narrator; and rapid scene-shifting, concentrating comic episodes into one or at most two stanzas and moving on quickly, allowing for both wide vision, a distancing effect between subject and audience, and swift comic pacing. They also make use of identical events, stressing the rustics' rude, incompetent behaviour in flirting, dancing, brawling, and the wives' lamentations and outcries. Further, they employ similar character-types (e.g. fashion-conscious milkmaids, stout millers, disgruntled minstrels) and comic names, such as "Hopcal3o," "Cardronow," and "Tisbe" in Peblis to the Play or "Gillie," "Platfute," and "Hucheoun" (hunchback) in Christis Kirk of the Grene.

But though both share theme, tone, form, and elements of caricaturization and action, the two poems are structurally different. Peblis to the Play is cyclical, following the events of one holiday in Peebles from daybreak to dark, beginning and concluding with the same lines, "At beltane quhen ilk bodie boun / To peblis to the play," and so seeming to come full circle. At dawn the young women and young men make themselves ready (1-50); they meet on the road to Peebles, pair off, and assemble in town to the amusement of its citizens (61-90); in a tavern a brawl ensues from a quarrel about the reckoning (91-140), and a cadger is caught up in the riot and spilled in the street, where he curses vigorously (141-80); after seven rioters are imprisoned in

13. MacLaine, op. cit., 6. Quotations of Peblis are from the Maitland Folio, I, 176-83; and Christis Kirk from Bannatyne, II, 262-68, as cited in note 1, supra.

the stocks dancing begins, until the piper quits for want of sufficient payment (181-230); and the lovers disperse at the end of the day (231-58). The action, encompassed in one day, is circular and also symmetrically balanced: sunup-sundown, women prepare-men prepare, meetings-departings, fighting-dancing, all given roughly equal weight and attention. The scene is elaborately set, but character development is slighted. We learn only a few names, and these as representatives of the group at large: Meg bewails her unattractive qualities (31-40), Gilbert lies knocked unconscious in the gutter (133-34), John Niksoun complains in the stocks (185-90), Will Swane dances clumsily (191-210). Yet there are many women, thirty-three other fighters, six more in the stocks, many dancers on the village green, and so on. Few characters are particularized, symbolic of the rest. And as the poem is balanced, the actual "brawl" takes up a relatively small proportion of the whole narrative.

Christis Kirk of the Grene, in contrast, develops in a linear fashion to a crescendo climax, one episode flowing into the next. This structure avoids cyclical balance but also the predictability of Peblis to the Play. Christis Kirk is almost entirely taken up with the comic brawl, as the setting (1-18), wooing (19-36), and dancing (37-54) are compressed into the first six stanzas, two stanzas devoted to each. The riot begins during the dancing with a fight between two men (55-63), grows into an absurd but potentially dangerous bow-and-arrow fight (64-108), and degenerates into a general brawl that embroils all of the citizens and their womenfolk as well (109-198), concentrating with cameo-like brevity on single episodes between certain contenders within the whole brawl context. As the poet isolates the actions of various individuals, characterization then plays

a more significant and less symbolic part in the narrative, incorporating descriptions with the stereotypes which are brief but quite vivid. The emphasis is on comic war, not love, with anti-feminism making a stronger showing than in Peblis (cf. Gillie's rejection of Jok, 28-35, or Dick's treatment of his nagging wife and mother, 190-98). The poem does not end in peace and harmony as does Peblis, with the fight forgotten and the dancing and lovers' tender separations fresh in mind, but with absurd, all-embracing violence and comic carnage. The battlers stop because of exhaustion, not because they have resolved their differences and come once again to love their neighbours. It is obvious from the first lines of the poem, "Wes nevir in scotland hard nor sene, / Sic dansing nor deray" (1-2; my italics), that the narrator is attempting to be wilder, quicker, more comically vigorous, to "outdo" rival poems in the genre much as tellers of tall tales try to top one another's best stories; and the poet is as good as his promise.

These structural differences, cyclical and linear, make for different kinds of comedies. Peblis, overall much less violent in its emphasis, is gentler in tone because, balanced, it touches on a variety of humorous episodes--costume and appearance, fighting, dancing, love-talk at departure. Each kind of comic feature or incident is given equal attention, the whole poem ending harmoniously and non-humorously. It does not take brawling as its main theme, and so does not build to a comic crescendo of pain. Peblis much resembles a comedy of manners, drawing on a range of comic incidents that ridicule social liabilities, ignorance in manners, dress, love-making, public sport, and so forth. Christis Kirk, on the other hand, is a comedy of matter, centering predominantly on thematically-related variations of comic violence.

"Gentler humour" is of course a relative judgment. Scorn, for instance, is abundant in Peblis: the celebrants' scorn for each other, as when others laugh at the miller's efforts at dancing (205-206); the townsfolks' scorn of the rustics and their appearance (84-90); and the narrator's ridicule for all, implied throughout. But there is no actual bloodshed, as there is in Christis Kirk (136, 169). In Peblis, Meg is ridiculous because she desires a lilywhite (i.e. non-workingclass) complexion; "ane winklot" ridiculous because she trips and comically exposes her privates when she falls, to which Mal-kin adds a lewd admonishment, "hyd 3ow! / Quhat neidis 3ow maik it sua? / 3on man will nocht ourryd 3ow!" (73-76); and "fayr ales" ridiculous because she swoons "for kyndnes" at the thought of leaving Atkin, her lover (239).

When the women of Christis Kirk are ridiculous it is because they are shrewish and bellicose like Gillie (23-25) and Dick's wife (194-95), or more generally because they wade into battle. They contribute to the atmosphere or take direct action in the conflict, reinforcing this specific theme instead of broadening and dispersing the comic emphasis through a variety of social criticisms. Even the brawl in Peblis is over quickly, one highlight of a full day, and seems to leave no lasting effects. Though thirty-three brawlers end "thrimland in ane midding off draff" (137-38) and seven "lay grufingis in the stokkis" (183-84), no serious damage has been inflicted. They are comically humiliated and physically degraded, but otherwise unscathed. The attention of Peblis' brawl is focussed (4 stanzas) on the chance involvement of an innocently-bystanding cadger, whose creels and person are knocked into the street. But as his helpmate turns exasperated questions on him he is even able to make sarcastic jokes: he

does not know if his horse threw him "Or gif I wes forfochtin faynt / And syn lay doun to rest me" (171-79). The reader is assured that no real harm has resulted from the brawling, an impression valid for the whole group. In Christis Kirk, piling incident on incident of bloody if comically exaggerated combat, we can well believe that at the end of the day many "fechtaris wer mischevit for evir" (125), as the poet ironically understates it.

Peblis to the Play exploits mildly comic incidents from all aspects of the day's activities, not focussing long on any given episode nor stressing one element at the expense of others. Christis Kirk of the Grene, in contrast, works toward a more comically potent crescendo effect, involving increasing numbers in the fighting and building many related incidents into a climactic general brawl that engages every man and woman in the town. The largest single component of the Christis Kirk brawl is the five-stanza archery feud. Men side with Dwny or Robene Roy, the originators of the fight, and take potshots at one another more or less seriously. That holiday-makers should be thus armed for target practice is not surprising, for as early as 1430 James I had ordered the revival of the "wappinschaws" initiated by Robert the Bruce, forbidding at the same time sports like golf or football, in order to encourage warlike preparedness. The banning of sports and promotion of fortnightly wappinschaws was periodically revived throughout the fifteenth century whenever war seemed imminent.¹⁴

14. See Ranald Nicholson, Scotland: The Later Middle Ages, (Edinburgh: 1974), 97, 305, 395, 475, and 492. At the same time, James I tried to regulate the increasingly extravagant dress of the merchant and peasant classes, and thereby cut waste expenditure (p. 305). The womens' dress and mens' "blew kappis" (10-15, 111) comically defy the spirit of this legislation, which was renewed more or less forcefully in 1457. See also Jones, op. cit., 1111-12.

But that the "bernis" (warriors, 112, as with Dunbar here used ironically) do so badly, for a variety of humorous reasons, is a satiric indication of the ineffectiveness of these peasant weaponshows, ridiculing their lack of competence in skill at arms. One fellow aims to pierce another's rear "cheikis...Bot be ane akerbraid it come not neir him" (68-70). Another pulls on the bowstring so hard the bow shatters (76). "Hary" is saved from injury by an expansive paunch and leather doublet. Only one man is actually hurt, a priest who, ironically, is not involved in the combat. He is killed an incredible mile away by an absurd accidental shot over a byre (104-105). When this death occurs--how anyone would know of another's injury at a great distance is comically left unexplained--the use of bow and arrow is immediately abandoned by all; and the young man responsible runs away "als ferss as fyre of flynt" (107), says the poet, borrowing a stock image found in Henryson (cf. the Morall Fabillis, 328). In these episodes we see operating the poem's main comic strategies: incongruity, especially in the ironic machinations of chance, the thwarting of intentions through accident and incompetence; and, above all, absurd exaggeration.

These strategies are continued in the remainder of the poem, composed of rapidly changing scenes, one- or two-stanza reports on the general drift of the fighting (109-121). Interspersed are anecdotal portraits of certain individuals' comic actions: the minstrel's judicious retreat (122-25), confirming conventional cowardice; Hucheoun, who battles ferociously until he spys his own blood, then runs away (127-44); the sowtar who fled seven miles for his wife's honour's sake, again irony and hyperbole (145-53); the ambushed miller, undefeated except by treachery (155-61); and the two "ramming" herdsman, comically settling a contest as their animals would, head to head (163-70).

The disputation of the herdsmen, possibly imitating an actual peasant sport, is a good illustration of the poet comically reducing his agents to the mindless animal level, operating wholly on instinct at the expense of reason. The poem climaxes on an anti-feminist note, with the women joining in the fight and all being beaten down bloody or collapsing with exhaustion (172-88). The poet works the tempo to a fever-pitch, at the same time maintaining interest in the general action with a string of vivid portraits.

Unlike Peblis, Christis Kirk does not conclude with an overview of the day's events and a gentle narrative withdrawal. It finishes with a denouement stanza describing the frustrations of Dick, having arrived too late for the fighting yet eager to participate. The stanza concentrates the whole action into one representative group:

Quhen all wes done, dik with ane aix
Come furth to fall a fiddler.
Quod he, "quhair ar 3one hangit smaix,
rycht now wald slane my bruder?"
his wyfe bad him, "ga hame, gub glaikis!"
and sa did meg his muder.
he turnd and gaif tham bayth their paikis,
For he durst ding nane udir / for feir,
At chrystis kirk of the grene pat day.
(190-98)

As a summing up stanza it is a brilliant and fitting anticlimax. The action is thematically integrated, especially in Dick's daring to hit no other than his womenfolk "for feir," as braggart cowardice among the participants is stressed repeatedly. It is also comically as well as psychologically apt, a particularizing scene as ironic and satiric as any before it in the narrative. It encapsulates in miniature the whole fight: the use of deadly weapons (the "aix"), unnecessarily strong force; idle boasts and mockery; the comic involvement of women not in love but in warfare, in real violence; and the close-knit relationship of the participants in civil broils as well as insight into

their strained social relations in a small community. It forwards the action even as it concludes that action appropriately, making use of most of the genre's conventions.

The anonymous narrative of "Sym and His Bruder" and Alexander Scott's The Iusting and Debait Vp at the Drum are peasant-joust (or peasant-tournament) poems, and so related to the peasant-brawl genre. "Sym and His Bruder" combines comic peasant-joust elements with ecclesiastical satire. Its comically ignoble tournament seems to develop out of the proposal of Sym's unnamed fellow-friar to marry a widow, the joust being a challenge of honour by certain unnamed "carlis." "Seems" is a necessary qualification, for the text is muddled, and cautions must be applied when interpreting it.¹⁵

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15. An unsatisfactory summary of the poem is given by Douglas Hamer, in Lindsay, III, 488, who then notes: "the poem is obscure, and much may be wanting." The first six stanzas, recounting the brothers' adventures as false pilgrims, are intact; as are the two concluding stanzas ("he endis the story with harme forlorne," 131). Most of the confusion resides in the wedding and joust scenes, lines 55 to 107, nearly half of the poem. The difficulty is at least three-fold: faulty transitions between stanzas, suggesting that stanzas are missing; perhaps most damaging, the many unspecified pronoun references; and ambiguous lines and obscure language. There are several points at which transition stanzas seem to be wanting. For example, between lines 63 and 64, where the brothers are being carried off to the wedding (58), but suddenly, inexplicably, "the bryd wount not to bruke him" and Sym's brother is being menaced on all sides (67-68); or between lines 108 and 109, where immediately after Squyer John of Mowis is introduced, ostensibly as a substitute jouster, so is introduced job Symmer the cowherd, who says "I will Iust as I can / Sen he is strikin doun" (111-12; my italics). Obviously, some action now lost has taken place. Other places at which transitions could be missing are between lines 72 and 73, 81 and 82, and 99 and 100. Missing stanzas may help to account for the quantity of unspecified pronoun references. As in the last example, just who was "strickin doun" in the rink--Sym's brother, Squyer John, or someone else?--is not made clear. There are a host of mysterious references to "he," "him," or "his" when we have few or no clues to whom the poet is alluding: for example, lines 59, 65-71, 82-86, 91, 93-96, 105, and 116. Nor is it ever made clear who the "carlis"

Like the other Scottish peasant-brawl poems, the fast-paced narrative shifts quickly from scene to scene, relying on brief but vivid character portraits and descriptive detail, building a comic composite out of several subordinate elements: the brothers' mendicant life, the near-wedding, and the subsequent tournament. Its tone is consistent with the genre as well. It is undoubtedly satiric in intent, broadly ridiculing each character involved and written from an outside, superior point of view. But the poem focusses throughout on the rascally pair of false friars, and is to a degree sympathetic in comic attitude toward them. Given the low reputation of the mendicant orders in satiric poetry, the brothers do not appear to be especially malicious, but are instead lazy, error-prone, and somewhat cynical. Sym is a rather good-natured charlatan. For instance, he remarks "I schrew þame þat leiss but lauchter" (44) as they sell bogus "pardone spellis" for their profit. He is also a sort of a wit, noting with dry mockery of a loser at the joust with smashed lips, "God saif him & the haly ghaist / And keip þe man fra manting mekle" (124-25). Further, the pair finally escape any lasting punishment. Unlike anti-mendicant satires such as "Pierce the Ploughman's Crede," the poem

leaves unresolved.

(55, 96), the "ladis" (65, 96), the "carle" (73), or "thay" (86-89) represent. They could be the bride's offended family. But equally the carle and his friends could be a rival for the widow's hand, challenging Sym's brother to a joust that the issue might be settled in manly fashion. After all, who is the "him" that the bride "wount not to bruke"? An uncouth peasant-rival, or Sym? If Sym, why her sudden change of heart, and how are we to interpret the churls swarming "agane þe man was mareit" (55-56)? These confusions are compounded by ambiguous phrases--such as Sym proverb-like "The meit is all miskareit" (62), "The ladis come to luk him" (65, 71), "This was no bourdene to broun hill / That gatt betwene þe browis" (100-101); and also lines 12-15, 37, 52-53, 59, and 64--and obscure language, such as "flud" (98), or "leggis" and "laist" (118). Taken altogether, these difficulties make for a highly confusing poem, and a necessarily tenuous interpretation.

is not heavy-handed and broadly abusive, but instead concentrates with comparative lightheartedness on the misadventures of two knaves and does not denounce clerical failings at large. These two, and not all of the clergy, are on comic trial. The poem's easy-going attitude, while pointing toward Reformation concerns, suggests a fifteenth century date of composition.

The sequence of episodes, like that of Christis Kirk of the Grene, is linear, one development in the narrative leading to the next with humorous logic. As its elements are necessary developments in the action, stemming from choices made by the agents, there is a greater unity of plot than in the peasant-brawl poems. The agents are recognizable protagonists, more like fully-fleshed characters. But the poem is not a story, as no recognizable peripeteia occurs either with Sym or his brother friar, no necessary but unexpected reversal of fortune, only a comic turn in the events, reversing their condition but not their state. Though there is to a degree a crescendo-effect built up in the growing number of unsuccessful joust participants, there is no real acceleration of the action nor does the poem rely on a comic climax involving everyone on the scene, but in fact concludes with the combat unresolved.

The scale of the action, and so of the comedy, is much smaller than that of the other two peasant-brawl poems. "Sym and His Bruder" does not involve whole communities, not even St. Andrews' religious communities, but a relatively small cast: two friends disguised as friars, a widow, a group of "carlis," two peasant-jousters (Squyer John and Job Symmer), and, briefly, a doctor. The occasion is not a general holiday, play, or fair but a local wedding growing into a tournament over the widow's honour. Although the poem does credit to none, much

of the satire centres on the anti-mendicant elements. The poem is clearly more limited in its scope as a comedy of manners.

The anti-mendicant satire, dominating the first half of the poem as it has come down to us, is traditional. It stems from the brothers' contradictory natures: they are religious hypocrites, offending against recognized spiritual ideals. The brothers are strong ("wicht") but lazy, able to live by honest effort but loathe to do so; paradoxically, they labour busily at chicanery in order to avoid working. They feign the religious life by begging as "palmeris" for five years at St. Andrews (7-8), though, ironically, they are not themselves in the least degree devout: "Thocht thay war wicht I warrand 3ow / Thay had na will to wirk / ...bot sen pair bairdis grew on pair mow / They saw nevir pe kirk within" (10-11, 16-17). They continue their slothful hypocrisy by sewing pilgrim's badges on their ragged tartan garments and setting out for Rome as porters of baggage (21-33), but reconsider the venture and return home with their wages, having come only as far as "kinkellis craggis," just south of St. Andrews (34-35). Each new absurd detail builds up an exaggerated portrait of their comic iniquity. But they can be active. Once they have "spendit of thair feis / ...thay flew our fellis/ als bissy as ony beis" (38-40) manufacturing fake religious relics like "sanct Iameis schellis / and pecis of palme treis" (41-42). They are successful cozeners, and amass a fortune. Their incongruous busyness in dishonestly breaking the expected vows of poverty contrasts ironically with their reluctance to work and laziness as holy pilgrims. They are obviously worshippers of Mammon, careless of their souls' survival.

Having subverted poverty and obedience, their comic hypocrisy extends to chastity as well. Rich once more and so "puft...vp in pryd"

(46-47), Sym's brother decides to take a bride. This is an absurd desire for one pretending to the celibate mendicant orders. Sym, in ironic contrast, is content merely to "levit in synning" (48-49), enjoying extra-marital affairs. Sexual abuses among the clergy were commonly satirized,¹⁶ but openly taking a wife is folly in the extreme. Here begins the brothers' real troubles, a woman conventionally providing the comic downfall of proud man.¹⁷

A case can be made for the "carle" as a love-rival, but I am inclined to think that the churls at the wedding are the widow's relatives, ensuring that the marriage take place and subsequently defending her honour when it does not. Supposing this view is correct, it is possible that a very wry hypocrisy indeed occurs when the "cavell" declares in the violent confusion, "I cleme to clergy" (70).¹⁸ Sym, the "low, rough" speaker menaced by irate blows, uses a precise legal phrase: he claims exemption from the death penalty (usually by hanging) at the hands of the secular authorities, on the grounds that he is a clergyman and so subject only to an ecclesiastical court. Not only is the clerical status of the brothers open to some doubt, his fearful equation of the family's threats--or perhaps even marriage to the widow itself--with the death penalty is a comic exaggeration. His claim to clerical exemption is possibly the richest irony of the poem,

16. Cf. the Abbot's sexual abuses in The Freiris of Berwik, or the jingle "Ther wes ane channone in this toun," in Bannatyne, III, 38.

17. The text is confused as to who is getting married. Sym is living in sin, but then "Sym to be kirk thay kareit" (58) instead of his brother. Whether this is an authorial slip, or comic indication of the "carlis" having accosted the wrong man, is unclear.

18. Cf. similar claims for exemption in Lindsay's Ane Satyre of the Thre Estaitis, lines 3627ff., in Lindsay, II, 333.

given the wedding situation the friars have ridiculously willed themselves into regardless of supposed prior religious obligations.

The secondary characters are uniformly ridiculous, contributing to the comic effect of the whole poem; although in comparison they are poorly drawn, indistinct. The bride-to-be is a widow who wastes no time in securing another husband, for

hir wedoheid fra the begynning
Wes neir ane moneth tyd;
Gif scho wes spedy ay in spynning
Tak witness of thame besyd ilk ane,
Bayth sym and his bruder.

(50-54)

She fits neatly into the comic convention of the Easily Consoled Widow. Scarcely a month in mourning, she eagerly spins a web to catch a new mate like some black widow spider--a subtly ironic use of imagery. Given the literary ancestry of such widows as Alyce of Bath and the Wedo of Dunbar's Tretis, the prognostication of marriage is not promising. The convention is so well-established that the bare mention of her status sets off comic reverberations, needing no greater development. Her relatives as well would seem to be just as overeager, and also insectlike, for "The carlis thay thikkit fast in cludis / Agane be man was mareit" (55-56). They offer inducements like "breid & beif and vper budis" (57), and, comically in considerable haste, "the tyme of none wes tareit" (60). When Sym's brother resists the rush to the altar, the angry relatives challenge him to combat ("glowrit vp and gaif a glufe," 74), a properly proffered gage which the brothers accept ("this Iusting I vndirtak," says Sym, 79). In accepting, an incongruous contrast is drawn between their accustomed mendicant rags ("tartane clowtis," 21; "dudis," 59) and Sym's knight-like assertion that "My coit is of gud stuffe" (80). The churl who offers the challenge is overly boastful ("begowth to crak," 73), and likewise absurd

in appearance:

his beird it wes als lang & blak
That it hang our his mouf;
he wes als lang vpoun the bak
as evir wes angus dufe.

(75-78)

The comparison with an animal, the "angus dufe," is comically insulting; symbolic of Christ, the dove ironically counterpoints their several sins.

As discussed, the early stage of the joust is confused. Someone--probably Sym's brother, although we cannot tell--was tied to a gray mare ("blame me bot I bind him"; "Than start thay to and tird him tyt," 83, 89); and at one point that same "him" is unhorsed ("Thay dashit him doun, þe dirt ourhaild him," 88). It is unclear who fights whom, nor the outcome of the early going. However, success seems ever elusive, as is to be expected in the peasant-brawl genre. Exactly what happens is obscure, although it is probable that Sym and his brother are worsted initially. But it appears that substitutes are exceptable in the rink, for Squire John sits "vp in þe schill, / And þat the lad-dis allowis Ilk ane / To Sym and his bruder" (106-108); and 3ob Symmer, "þe stirrepman" and "nolthird of þe toun" (109-110), sallies forth later. It is unclear on whose behalf he accepts the challenge.

3ob is comically outfitted in jerryrigged armour consisting of "twa plaitis of ane awld pan" (133). So protected, naturally he sustains considerable injury on the first pass, a blow to the mouth that splits his lips open and knocks out a tooth ("Abyd, quod the leich, I se a waist: / his wrangtwth is in wanting," 122-23). Comic ineptitude, as expected, rules over the proceedings; but, though 3ob is undoubtedly foolish, his behaviour and injury are rather too painfully depicted to be thought funny, as was obviously intended. We are left with a

comic portrait--comic, that is, in its exaggeration--of the effect of Job's hurt, his neglected cattle wandering among the corn, and Sym lamenting they ever entered into the affair:

His mowth wes schent and so foreschorne
held nowdir wind nor watter;
fair weill all blast of blawing horne,
he mycht not do with harme forlorne,
The nolt begowth till skatter,
The ky ran startling to the corne:
"Wa worth the tyme thow gat hir now,"
quod symme till his bruder.

(k27-35)

Confusion reigns at the climax, and Job is left in a lamentable state, vividly and for the most part undeservedly so: he is a surrogate warrior sustaining the damage properly belonging to the false brothers. After the episode of the miscarried wedding there is a sudden change of comic direction, though this change grows out of the foregoing episodes: our attention is shifted from the rogues to the fools, the substitute peasant-jousts, away from specific ecclesiastical satire to more general mockery of social groups in scenes of buffoonery. The change of direction creates the feeling that the two kinds, anti-mendicant satire and comic peasant-tournament, have been forcibly joined, satisfying neither kind of comedy. As the brothers have escaped poetic justice, and the outcome of the joust remains undecided, the poems ends inconclusively and on a rather sour note.

Alexander Scott's burlesque peasant-joust, The Iusting and Debait Vp at the Drum Betuix William Adamsone and Johine Sym,¹⁹ is also a contest of honour over the love of a woman. Yet, a social rather than ecclesiastical satire, it bears more of an affinity to Dunbar's "Tur-

19. I refer to the edition of the poem in James Cranstoun, ed. The Poems of Alexander Scott, STS 1st Ser. 36, (Edinburgh & London: 1896), 9-15.

namement" in Fasternis Evin in Hell and Lindsay's "Iusting Betuix Watson and Barbour" than to "Sym and His Bruder," and in originality, poetic competence, and skill in character delineation surpasses the latter two poems. Like all three peasant-tournament poems, Vp at the Drum is a mimetic transcript and not a proper story. The action in the poem depends too heavily on chance and comic accident, rather than on choices carried out by the agents; and there is no reversal of fortune for either character, only unexpected changes in circumstance, so the poem lacks a distinct peripeteia. Sym and Will are both ridiculous figures, foolish victims of their own physical and emotional failings; and the maid over whom they battle is finally ludicrous, unhappily duped by Will but absurd for having given him any credence at all.

Likewise in accordance with the peasant-tournament genre, the tone of the poem is mock-heroic. Will and Sym apparently are skinnners in Dalkeith ("Bettir we bath wer byand hyddis / And weddir skynnis at hame / Nor heir," 127-29), but they are ironically described in the language of romance as "freikis fell" (4), "stalwart knychtis" (16), and "noble chiftanis" (23). The "may" over whom they fight, no doubt some local peasant beauty, is also accorded the ironic romance dignity of "lusty lady gent" (3); and the fellows who gather to witness the encounter are labelled "3unkeris stowt" (41, 171) and "galgart" men (42). Continuing in this vein of absurd exaggeration, Scott favourably compares these "knychtis" with "Mars, the god armipotent" (5) and Hercules battling the Devil (7-9), and their deeds with those of "the dowsy peiris" (12), the twelve paladins of Charlemagne. The elevated comparisons are excruciatingly inappropriate. But Scott lifts the terms and conventions of the romance joust and transports them whole-

Than gelly Johine come in a jak
 To feild quhair he wes feidit;
 Abone his brand ane bucklar blak--
 Baill fell the bern that bedit.
 He slippit swiftly to þe slak,
 And rudly doun he raid it;
 Befoir his curpall° wes a crak, °crupper
 Culd na man tell quha maid it,
 ffor lawtter.
 (181-89)

The alliteration supports the impression that we are listening to romance literature; but the substance of the denouement, dependent on involuntary animal processes, is at once incongruous with the idealized portrait which has gone before and comically degrading. The introduction of effluvia for comic effect is also common to Dunbar's and Lindsay's peasant-tournament poems. But Scott more realistically attributes it to the horses ("Thair avairis fyld vp all the feild, / Thay wer so fow and pang / With drafe," 176-78); however, using horse

rather than human farts, Scott makes a subtler joke of it by focussing attention on the mocking low wit of the bystanders who "culd na...tell quha maid it," man or horse.

What makes Scott's Vp at the Drum most unusual in the peasant-joust genre is the fact that, for a variety of comic complications, the joust itself never takes place. Substituted instead are two exaggerated build-ups to a combat that never transpires. "With twa blunt trincer speiris squair" Sym and Will intend "to fecht...for lufe, as is the gyiss" (51-54). But "ane freynd," no doubt rightly fearing harm would result, steals "thair styngis" and hides them (55-60). Just as the signal to charge is given, Sym can only demand with embarrassed rage "Quhair is my speir?" (64-65). Both "knights" are humiliated before the crowds, made ludicrous by a chance comic reversal. They swear impotent oaths of vengeance, and all retire for a sumptuous breakfast (71-90). The heroic, exaggerated prelude leading up to the fight is incongruously undermined by this unexpected development, a ridiculous anti-climax to the anticipated clash. The second comic thwarting of expectations occurs when Will backs down from the challenge he had accepted, suddenly showing a cowardly streak in the face of "litill Sym" (133). Comic scorn rains down on him from all concerned. Encouraged by the moral victory, Sym increases his already excessive bravado, using in a boast the contextually comic and insulting image of a mother spanking a child:

"ffor, wer 3e foursum in a flok,
I compt 3ow not a leik,
Thot I had rycht not bot a rok
To gar 3our rumpill reik
Behynd."
(145-49)

In Sym's absurd, egoistical overeagerness he urges Will on to the contest by the quickest route, and so blunders into falling halfway down

a steep hillside with his horse (155-65). His ridiculous accident, rather than encouraging Will, ironically only increases Will's fright, much to the disgust of the spectators (166-76). The contest is put off by a sequence of accident-governed comic delays. Night falls before a joust can be fought, and it is postponed "for fault of law" (193), a legal term meaning the time was feriate, that court activities--including this court of honour--must be suspended at sunset (cf. Henryson's Morall Fabillis, 1199). Scott maintains a mock-heroic adherence to traditional romance formulae. But all have idled the day away dining, boasting, and suffering foolish mischances; it is ironic, then, that Sym blames circumstances for the prevention of the contest and not ineptitude. Still bragging "with mony crak & flaw," all take their several roads home, unharmed (195-200). Peasant-joust poems depend chiefly for humour on the incompetence of ignoble men in skill at arms, on their obvious fears, and on the lack of damage inflicted on their opponents. To some extent these elements are operating in Vp at the Drum. But, ironically, Sym and Will never get so far as actual combat, and therefore reveal their fears and ineptitude outwith the battle context. Therefore, they are not prevented from mouthing comical empty boasts on the way home, for they did not succeed in revealing their folly completely. Their foolishness exposes itself as even more extreme than normally could be expected, because they have not been truly tested. A peasant-joust that fails to take place at all through fear, lack of skill, and absurd accident gives an original and pleasantly ironic twist to convention.

It seems at first that Sym escapes with his honour more or less intact: he is not afraid of combat; indeed, he welcomes it. The spectators laugh at him when the dashing figure he seems to cut is demol-

ished by an incontinent horse; but their laughter en passant is mild compared with the laughter, scorn, and mocking jibes aimed at the timorous Will (138-41, 152, 171-76). Nevertheless, both characters are equally ridiculous. Sym loses his spear and his balance, and on both occasions his dignity as well. In addition, he eventually loses the maid. Will is not inept, but cowardly; Sym is no coward, but he is clumsy and unskilful. I would not suggest a direct parallel, but the situation--the tournament for a woman's hand--and the trio themselves are comic versions of Arcite, Palamon, and Emilye in Chaucer's Knight's Tale. Sym and Will fail to achieve the golden mean of courage, Sym representing excessive and Will defective courage. Sym is boastful and easily angered: when he feels the smart of having stupidly lost his spear, he dismounts quickly "as a fowne"--an absurd image--and swears loudly "He sall rew my stalf has stowin, / For I salbe his deid" (71-74); he continues throughout the poem to swear useless, violent oaths (91-96, 133-36, 142-49, 193-95). His volatile temperament is symptomatic of the excessive eagerness that leads him to spill his horse. Despite similar oaths (91-96), Will turns coward at the prospect of going through with the engagement, losing his courage altogether.

Yet, ironically, their physical statures run counter to audience expectations. The excessively belligerent Sym is "littill," of smaller and slighter physique than Will, who is "wichttar of corss...and bettir knittin" (33-34). In contrast, Will, though powerfully built, "moir lerge of lyth and lym / Nor [Sym] be sic thre" (135-36), is incongruously a thorough coward. Scott comically plays off audience expectations regarding their size and bellicosity, ironically counterpointing his theme. But, while humorous, frightened giants and fero-

cious small men are common in real life. Scott has skilfully drawn realistic characters with recognizable personalities, as he had vividly drawn the entire day's activities and rendered them plausible, at the same time managing to sustain the incongruous theme and mock-heroic tone.

As Sym and Will may be seen as comic equivalents of Arcite and Palamon, so chaste Emilye is parodied in the maiden, the cause of their dispute. The love ideal, the ennobling feelings which initially cause them to enter the lists, is comically betrayed in the "L'Envoy" to the poem. Sym, like Arcite, wins the contest but loses the prize. Will, who yielded without a blow being struck, has his satisfaction of the girl; and Sym does not enjoy her favours. As Will shamed himself in war, so he shames himself in love: Scott specifically draws the love-war analogy in asserting "Quhairfoir he tynt þe feild þat day / And tuk him to ane mill / To hyd him" (207-209). The maiden, hardly a model of chastity or even much discrimination in love-partners, and regardless of the joust's outcome, foolishly allows herself to be seduced and made pregnant on Will's false promises of marriage. Her behaviour ironically negates the necessity of holding the tournament at all, completely nullifying it as a serious activity. All characters finally betray themselves as well as each other.

The mock-heroic tone necessarily implies the poet's superior laughter at his characters. But I suggest that the laughter of incongruity dominates. Much of the obvious superior laughter in Vp at the Drum is aimed at Will by the spectators, mocking his fear. A greater part of the time Sym and Will are made ridiculous through comic accidents, rendered absurd through mischance, not choice. Further, Scott makes no direct authorial comment on the folly of the proceedings. He mocks

but does not insult his characters, take sides, describe their beliefs and behaviour as foolish, or remark on their moral failings. He appends a "L'envoy" but not a moralitas, leaving judgments to the reader. Condemnation is implied but not relished. That is, Scott takes an evident delight in the poem, yet there is no hint of the tone of malicious glee characterizing Dunbar's playful but hostile treatment of the sowtar and tel3our, or the pleased scorn of Lindsay for Watsoun and Barbour. Scott's characters are characters and not simple caricatures, vividly drawn and so sympathetic to some extent. Will and Sym get off rather lightly compared to the pain and thorough humiliation suffered by the sowtar and tel3our, Watsoun and Barbour, or 3ob Symmer in "Sym and His Bruder." They have endured embarrassment, and some neighbourly scorn. Yet, though there is an element of stupidly self-satisfied smugness in the portrait, when they part for home down Potter's Row still bragging there is also an air of relief, peace, and harmony. Even the maiden's surrender seems more a bad judgment than a culpable error on her part, and the shame belongs wholly to Will "as coward fals of fey" (210), the only personal aspersion cast by Scott uncloaked by the buffer of a mocking tone. The poem conveys something of a democratic atmosphere, and we do not feel that Scott thinks of himself as greatly above the assembly he describes. The poem is more gently humorous than satiric. Superior laughter is undoubtedly involved; but I think that the final mood is one of pleasure, of delight in the absurd, rather than real scorn.

iii. Eldritch Fantasies

An appropriate link between the wild eldritch fantasy poems in this grouping and the comic contentiones we have already seen is "How the

First Heland Man of god was maid of Ane horss turd in argylle as is said." It contains both elements, popular comic fantasy and contentious satire. The poem involves an absurd miracle of God prompted by a "sporting" St. Peter--a miracle parodying the creation of Adam--and intranational nose-tweaking in verse at the expense of the "barbaric" Highlanders. Its good-humoured nonsense and ironic invective are well-balanced throughout; and the narrative situation is a brilliant vehicle for the pointed social satire which, from its provocative title through its final couplet, was obviously foremost in the poet's mind.

The poem belongs to a popular European tradition of comic and rather blasphemous tales--curiously characteristic of an age secure in its faith--involving spiritual beings such as the Devil, St. Peter, and God (that is, Christ). God and St. Peter as "comic" characters, for an instance close at hand, are also present to a lesser degree in "The Ballad of Kynd Kittok." But there are many examples: a comic St. Peter is the main character in two of the anonymous A C. Mery Talys (1526);²⁰ a minstrel, the Devil's deputy, and St. Peter dice for souls in the thirteenth century French fabliau "St. Peter and the Minstrel";²¹ and there is a thirteenth century Italian (and fifteenth century German) analogue to Chaucer's Merchant's Tale in which God and St. Peter take the roles assigned by Chaucer to Pluto and Proserpina.²²

20. See Hermann Oesterley, ed. Shakespeare's Jest Book, A C. Mery Talys, (London: 1866), Nos. XXI and LXXVIII.

21. Translated by Peter Rickard in Medieval Comic Tales, ed. D.S. Brewer, (Cambridge: 1972), 19-25.

22. Brewer, *ibid.*, 79-81; the German version is translated by David Blamires. An Italian analogue, Un Uomo Ricco e la Sua Donna, is cited by Larry Benson and T.M. Anderson, The Literary Context of Chaucer's Fabliaux, (New York: 1971), 238-55; and other analogues are collected in Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, ed. W.F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, (New York: 1941), 341-56. God and St. Peter stories go back to classical origins:

This last analogue bears a broad resemblance to "The First Helandman." In it, God and St. Peter are strolling and talking when St. Peter spies the indecorous scene in the pear tree and asks God to intervene. God and St. Peter have a benign wit-butts relationship: St. Peter is comically flawed with ignorance, fussiness, an easily offended moral sense, and short-tempered indignation; and God, possessed of a non-biblical sense of humour,²³ performs little tricks which, while not malicious, serve to spark a comic episode (that is, an episode comically vexing to St. Peter). God, in contrast, is wise, amused, tolerant, and merciful. This vision of a good-prankster God in the folk tradition may extend as far back as the Apocryphal Gospels.²⁴

God and St. Peter hold to this kind of relationship in both "The First Helandman" and "Kynd Kittok," where God laughs at the amusing if sinful antics of His creatures and at an exasperated St. Peter. The first Highlander is created when God takes in earnest "a sport word" of St. Peter's to "mak a heilandmen of this horss turd" lying in the road (3-4). The resulting prototype Highlander, a criminal rascal from the first instant of his creation, pledges to be a cattle-thief and dares to steal God's "gowly" knife (8-12). It is St. Peter

for example, the Horatian Odes involving Apollo and Mercury.

23. Christ weeps but does not laugh in the Gospels. It is therefore interesting to note that it was generally assumed, at least in tales such as these from the Middle Ages throughout Europe, that the judge of all mankind must possess a sense of humour, part and parcel of His mercy.
24. Cf. Montague R. James, trans. The Apocryphal New Testament, (Oxford: 1924), 49-55, the story of Christ as a boy in "The Gospel of Thomas." In the Medieval Room of the British Museum there are fourteenth century English tiles preserved that illustrate apocryphal scenes of Christ's childhood--making clay birds and breathing life into them, striking dead a malicious neighbour boy but restoring him to life at his parents' request, lengthening a short board in Joseph's workshop, and so on--"pranks" which comically prefigure the miracles.

lacking omniscience, who unsuccessfully "socht this gowly fast vp and doun" (13), and a comically enraged St. Peter who sternly rebukes the thief: "'ffy!' quod sanct petir, 'thow will nevir do weill: / And thow bot new maid sa sone gais to steill'" (19-20). That is, St. Peter is confounded by God's little jest. God merely addresses the thief with a drily ironic and knowing question: "'Now,' quod god, 'heir a marvell: how can this be, / that I sowld want my gowly And we heir bot thre?'" (15-16). Caught, the Highlander "humffs" and surrenders the knife. Gow "lewchs" (11), and does not admonish His new creature but patiently accepts his utterly dishonest nature.

The Highlander would seem to be the product of a satirist with a pure Lowlands bias. The choice of clay alone to fashion a new man is a strong indication. The Highlander is naturally and single-mindedly criminal, fearlessly stupid, and unrepentent before his Maker. His first and last words confirm him in thievery: "I will doun in be lawlands, lord, and thair steill a kow" (8), for "Sa lang as I may geir gett to steill, will I nevir wirk" (22). Given life, his first and only thought is to steal: an intrinsic choice between good and evil has already been made; he is naturally a thief. As his urge to steal is in-built, he is undeterred by the prospect of being hanged for his sins, and likewise apparently heedless of a hellish berth awaiting him after death. God reminds him, "And thow steill A cow, carle, thair thay will hang the." Yet the Highlander replies, "Quattrack, lord, of that, for anis mon I die" (9-10). His ignorance and obstinacy vie with each other for supremacy in his character. He even dares to steal from his Creator, comic ingratitude and audacity at its height. And in his retort to St. Peter, embracing the sinner's life, he ironically founds his oath on the Church, blasphemously swearing "be 3on

kirk" (21) to steal so long as "geir" is available. He is designed to be the ridiculous model of an irreligious, cattle-rustling lost soul after which all other Highlanders are patterned. His perversity, folly, and criminal tendencies are portrayed as being as instinctive as they are excessive. As in many fables, there is not direct satiric attack, no heavy-handed didactic moral assault advanced. The basic premise for the satire is witty; and the poet is compact and skilful, despite metrical irregularities, in the handling of his material. We are not told his message, it is shown us in the agents' actions.

But our own judgment of the Highlander is tempered somewhat by the fact that God accepts the new being as defective. The "carle" is absurd enough to be almost touching. It is tempting, although admittedly this is akin to the Shelleyian view of Milton's Satan, to regard the Highlander's qualities of vigorous independence, high-spirited audacity, and Devil-may-care courage as nearly serving to make him an appealing villain. God admonishes him, but does not condemn him; that suggestion is St. Peter's (19). God's laughter is that of ridiculous amusement, not ridiculous scorn, and does not seem to damn the Highlander automatically. This makes it rather difficult for a mortal audience to adopt a truly superior posture, in opposition to the Creator. Therefore, the incongruous laughter is at least equally balanced against ridicule, a leavening of sympathy that makes "The First Helandman" a humorous poem, not simply a satiric one.

At first glance "The First Helandman" looks to be an anecdote-like tale. Its episodes comically play off traditional actions--for example, the mock-creation of man or creation of mock-man accompanied by God's moral indifference--and conventional moral standards, as in treating theft as normal, leading to an incongruous and so unexpected

"reversal," the Highlander's non-repentance before his Maker manifest in his defiant final lines. But this reversal merely marks a comic travesty, an ironic demolition of serious (moral) expectations held by the audience. It does not constitute a definite peripeteia: there is no change in the Highlander's circumstances or behaviour, no loss or gain of self-knowledge in ironically revealing his perverse moral attitude. A comic reversal, some unexpected verbal or actional incongruity, must be distinguished from a reversal in the character's fortune and the spectator's emotional perception of that change. Without a marked change in the agents, the poem must be considered a fantastic mimetic transcript and not a story.

"The Ballad of Kynd Kittok,"²⁵ on the other hand, is likewise fantastic but a proper story. A distinct reversal of fortune occurs when Kittok is expelled from Heaven, an occurrence normally viewed as a disaster. But, because of the highly incongruous comic mode exhibited by the poem, Kittok's loss of Heaven is not seen as a calamity but instead a fortuitous accident--yet a reversal nevertheless. She easily accepts banishment by St. Peter, for she was not temperamentally suited to Heaven: she thinks "the aill of hevin wes sour" (30), a symbolic indication of her general discontent; indeed the place gives the impression of being too restrictive for her free-spirited nature. Further, though finally forced out, she initially wished to leave of her own accord, having tried Heaven for seven years before effecting what amounts to an escape. That is, she makes a trial of the life there and voluntarily rejects it. The action results from the agent's

25. I refer to the edition of the poem in W. Mackay Mackenzie, ed. The Poems of William Dunbar, (London: 1932), 169-70. The attribution to Dunbar must be considered false.

choice. The poem is, broadly, a comedy in a divine sense rather than merely comic: she attains the highest spiritual reward appropriate to her, busily and we suspect happily serving in a public inn within sight of Heaven. This reversal is both morally fitting ("Sanct Petir hat hir with a club...becaus the wif yeid wrang," 32-33) and aesthetically satisfying. As she gets what she likes and deserves, the characters' and auditors' responses are in harmonious agreement.

"Kynd Kittok" comes into the same fantasia tradition as "The First Helandman," but the poem is not satiric but instead wholly humorous. It relies on absurd fantasy and so the laughter of incongruity over the laughter of superiority. It is altogether gentler, more humane, and affectionate than the biting work of, say, Dunbar. The focus is on Kittok's impossible adventures after death, although God and St. Peter are present as a comic motif. They are introduced into the narrative as subordinant elements, figuring centrally in Kittok's comic activities but not given dominant roles. St. Peter is again a comic butt-figure, at least until his final ascendancy over Kittok; and God is again all-seeing, morally relaxed, and in possession of a robust sense of humour. Kittok manages to outmanoeuvre St. Peter by quietly slipping inside Heaven's gates, a deed apparently affected with God's hearty approval:

And to the yettis of hevin fast can the wif fair;
 And by Sanct Petir, in at the yet, scho stall prevely:
 God lukit and saw hir lattin in and lewch his hert sair.
 And thar, yeris sevin,
 Scho levit a gud life,
 And wes our Ladyis hen wife,
 And held Sanct Petir at strif
 Ay quhill scho wes in hevin.
 (19-26)

Kittok does not deserve to enter, but if God laughingly accepts her the reader has no cause to quibble. Kittok herself is a comic mixture

of naughty but nice, "gay" but "gend" (1), able to live "a gud life" and serve Our Lady in an appropriate capacity as henwife, yet at the same time she is comically shrewish in her continual strivings with St. Peter. When she abandons Heaven for a proper drink of ale she is encouraged in her decision to leave by an irascible and somewhat slapstick St. Peter, who raises a lump on her head with a club (32-33). Pain is not an emotional consideration, as she runs away undamaged, and their conflict takes on the flavour of a Punch-and-Judy brawl. Their relationship and behaviour have affinities with the domestic life in the fabliaux and chansons de mal mariée. This physical business is comically out of keeping with Heaven's presumed dignity and spirituality. St. Peter exacts personal revenge and serves justice at one stroke. But Kittok's exclusion, no great hardship, is not a serious situation; and, after all, though she has no right to Heaven, she could always sneak in again if she so desired. The narrative is wholly concerned with Kittok, the comic protagonist, so much so that she seems the sole inhabitant of Heaven with the divine personages.

The poem's reliance on nonsense is two-fold: that is, structurally, its episodes stemming from the illogical narrative premise yet following a comic consistency; and verbal, chiefly in reporting self-contradictory and/or absurd facts. The posthumous setting of Kittok's fantastic adventures is juxtaposed against conventional expectations, for example serious eschatological expectations such as Dante's Divine Comedy presents. Death, Hell's torments, and Heaven's ethereal bliss are completely deflated or sidestepped as serious concerns: Kittok is an alewife who, unbelievably, "deit of thirst, and maid a gud end" (5); on the way to her spiritual reward she becomes lost ("wanderit," 8),

and at a magic well absurdly boards a passing snail and rides to Heaven with a cheerful "Ourtane fallow, haill!" (8-13); and, having arrived, she continuously engages in buffoonery with St. Peter. No episodic turn proceeds logically to the next but none is inconsistent with the others; agreeable surprise is a chief ingredient of the humour.

The afterlife presented her resembles the bourgeois world of the fabliau. A state of playfulness seems to exist after death, with real suffering not remotely possible, even exclusion from God, the traditional notion of hell, finally having no effect on Kittok. Heaven is envisioned as an ordinary medieval walled city--not absurd in itself and an idea which had extensive iconographic support--with God a sort of omniscient mayor and St. Peter his farcical porter. It is a city with all of the workaday concerns, for instance the need for food and drink, work and rest; a temporal place where time is marked by day and night instead of a Miltonic timeless eternal light. It is a city complete with a high-gate (29), curfew bell (31), and extra-Heavenly ale-house, which Kittok comically prefers, just down the road (15). The city is complete, that is, except for castles and other trappings of the nobility. Her posthumous world is humanized, Heaven, like the woman herself, capable of only a fabliau dignity at best, a place both familiar and tame, benign and comfortable, and from which dreadful possibilities are systematically excluded.

Joined with the poem's comic action, and fabliau characters and setting, are verbal jokes, impossible or silly details that serve to sustain the absurd tone. Kittok impossibly "duelt furth fer in to France, apon Falkland Fell" (2). Her beauty is ridiculously compared to "a caldrone cruke cler under kell" (4), yoking kitchen and drawing-room imagery; this is possibly a double pun, as kell, according to the

DOST, can mean "sooty" as well as "caul" or headpiece. A courageous soul, "scho dredit nought in hevin for to duell" (6). Later she makes the absurd accusation that "the aill of hevin wes sour" (30). The beginning of the second stanza is particularly rich with self-contradictory details before moving on to the business of crashing Heaven's gates:

Scho diet of thrist in this world, that gert hir be so dry,
 Scho never eit, bot drank our mesur and mair.
 Scho slepit quhill the morne at none, and rais airly.
 (16-18)

The lines encapsulate the strategy of verbal humour in the poem: misdirection, setting up straightforward expectations in the reader's mind and then immediately undermining them with absurdly contradictory statements. The "fantastic" mode is sustained by ridiculous adventures ironically demolishing conventional expectations, supported by patterns of verbal incongruities.

Unlike "Kynd Kittok," three other comic supernatural fantasies, "King Berdok," "The Gyre Carling," and "Lord Fergus' Ghost," are all fantastic mimetic transcripts. The former two poems are minor burlesques of romances and the latter is a parodic exorcism-cum-marvellous "geist" (94) of the tiny ghost's adventures.

"King Berdok" and "The Gyre Carling" bear a close resemblance to proper stories, as the characters both engage in activities that result in physical changes which are unexpected and apparently degradatory. Berdok metamorphoses into a bracken bush (42) and the Gyre Carling into a sow to effect their respective escapes from besiegment. But it must be argued that, like the "reversal" in "The First Heland-man," these changes are merely comic turns in the episodic sequence: they do not result in real reversals in the characters' fortunes or

emotional states, nor do these changes necessarily arise from actions which they have chosen. Berdok is transformed by Mercury into a bush, terrifying his opponents and so lifting the King of Fairy's siege; but Berdok is still suffering the initial discomfort of his unrequited love (46). The Carling, because of one Blasour's love for her also besieged by the armies of the King of Fairy, escapes as a sow "grunting our the greik se" (20), and "for despyte / Is mareit with mahomyte" (22-23). But becoming Queen of the Jews in this form, ridiculous and grotesque in the eyes of the reader, represents no reversal of status or emotional variance in "pat devillisch deme" (27). Absurdly, it saddens only the chickens and dogs of Cramond and Haddington (26-30). These turns involving the protagonists are only comic surprises. No peripeteia occurs in either poem, and they must be considered mimetic transcripts.

The case against categorizing "Lord Fergus' Ghost"²⁶ as a proper story is even more clear. Its episodes are not sequentially connected, and there can be therefore no plot reversals because no episode develops logically out of or is logically connected with any other. Characterization, the pre-requisite of a story's action, is virtually non-existent. The first sixty-six lines, built primarily out of absurd lists of magic ingredients and fake Latin tags, draw out a description of the mock-"coniuratioun." The final thirty lines provide a description of the sprite and summation of its ridiculous posthumous history. There is of course no peripeteia, no change in the ghost's state re-

26. The other two poems are anonymous, but Earl F. Guy, "Some Comic and Burlesque Poems in Two Sixteenth Century MS. Anthologies," (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss., University of Edinburgh: 1952), 30-31, suggests based on linguistic and historical evidence that "Lord Fergus' Ghost" was composed about 1535 by James Wedderburn.

sulting from its actions; nor has the poem unity, as any of the poem's episodes could be transposed or even excised without seriously affecting the whole. The poem's lack of emphasis on action and unity, distancing it furthest from story-proper, contributes to its being the least memorable and least comic poem of the three.

All three poems, though in different forms and meters,²⁷ seem to be thematically cross-related. Each involves characters of strange stature (miniature or gigantic), outlandish places (Babilon, Maryland, Islam, Kandelie), mythic kingships (King of Fairy, King Orpheus), absurd love-affairs (Berdok and the Golk of Maryland, Blasour and the Carling, Fergus and the Spanish flea), and transformations or conjurations of a supernatural kind. "The Gyre Carling" and "Lord Fergus' Ghost" are both at pains to refer back to "betokis bour" (lines 2 and 5, respectively). "Betok" is unglossed in the DOST. It is possible that the reference is to a specific place, Beattock in Dumfreisshire; although if so the comic significance of this locale is now obscure. But possibly the term is a variant spelling of "Berdok's bower," the two poems referring back to and in their ways answering "King Berdok" by exaggerating its madness. This suggestion seems likely in light of the closing lines of "The Gyre Carling": "All this langor for lufe befoirtymes befell / Lang or betok wes born" (33-34; my italics). It raises the question of who "betok" was if not Berdok, King of Babylon as the Carling was Queen of the Jews, both poems closely related in theme, content, and tone. The parallel romance themes ("langor for

27. "The Gyre Carling" and "Kynd Kittok" use the identical 13-line stanza employed by romances such as Awntyrs of Arthur, suggesting a parodic relationship. "Fergus' Ghost" and "Berdok" both employ couplets, the former using irregular trimeter, as in The Colkelbie Sow, and the latter more regular tetrameters.

lufe" and "for lufe Luvaris sufferis pane") and episodes like the sieges by the King of Fairy in these two poems bear an especially close relationship, suggesting that "King Berdok" inspired a composition about a grotesque female counterpart, "The Gyre Carling." "Lord Fergus' Ghost," reaching back to explain the birth of "Orpheus king and elpha quene" (93), is more tenuously connected with the other two poems. The comic episode of Fergus' ghost stealing "goddis quhittle," Abraham's "quhorle and...quhum quame," and fra þe carle of þe mune / ane pair of auld yrn schone" (73-76), and its use of the metrics of and reference to the poem "cokilbys feist" (95), suggest the influence of the two fantasy poems "The First Helandman" and The Colkelbie Sow, respectively.

The technique of combining impossibilities with absurdities makes up the main comic strategy of the eldritch fantasy genre. Not unexpectedly, comic release from restraint (i.e. logical incongruity) is the chief kind of laughter sought in the fantasy poems. Sex and violence are also treated comically, and so aggressions are provided a safe outlet by the psychic censor. Given certain facts, readers are led to expect one thing only to find these expectations deflated in the lines immediately following. For example, as a conventional knightly lover, King Berdok "wes ane stalwart man of hairt and hand" (13). From this we might reasonably expect an appropriately worthy love for so valiant a gentleman. Instead, we are told

he wowit þe golk sevin 3eir of maryland,
 Mayiola, And scho wes bot 3eir is thre,
 Ane bony bird and had bot ane E.
 Neuirpeless king berdok luvit hir weill,
 ffor hir foirfute wes langar than hir heill.

(14-18)

In these last two lines an absurd situation is supplied an equally absurd explanation, compounding the illogicality and so heightening the

humour of a seven year longing for a three year old creature. Or, more straightforwardly, just plain silly developments in the story transpire, pure comic release from the restraints of logic, as when Berdok's attackers "stellit gunis to be killogy laich / And proppit gunis with bulettis of raw daich" (27-28).

"The Gyre Carling" is somewhat less dependent on ridiculous elements than "King Berdok," instead emphasizing more strongly the grotesque. This difference makes "King Berdok" on the whole a gentler toned, more good-natured and "fun" poem. For example, the Carling "levit vpoun christiane menis flesche and rewt heidis vnleipit" (4); and love-sick Blasour "gadderit ane menzie of modwartis to warp doun [her] tour" (7), and when wounded "bled ane quart / off milk pottage inwart" (10-11). Nor does the poet hesitate to introduce grotesque scatological elements in "The Gyre Carling," low comedy totally absent from "King Berdok": "the carling luche and lut fart / North berwick law" (12-13). Both poems, however, provide the added comic level of parody, broadly burlesquing the heroic characters, noble loves, and love-inspired prowess and warfare of the serious romances with comic inversions of those features.

"Lord Fergus' Ghost," in contrast, depends more heavily on verbal incongruities. As character and action are hardly considerations, the poem relies primarily on verbal twists and nonsense to forward the humour. It too has its share of incongruous situations, such as Fergus stealing from God and other exalted personages or marrying "the littill spenzie fle" (87). But much of the poem is given over to the humorous conjuration of the ghost: it involves comic spells of nonsense Latin ("littill gaist I coniure the / with lierie & larie," 52-53), foolish instructions ("cry harbert tuthless," 22), and lists of

absurd or bizarre ingredients for the mock-exorcism ("Thir thingis mon
3e beir / Brynt in ane doggis eir: / Ane pluch and paddill & ane palme
corss, / Thre tuskis of ane awld deid horss," 31-34, etc). The ef-
fect is that of a comic version of the witches' brew in Macbeth, with
an appropriately non-sinister end in view, the laying of a harmless
if tricky miniature ghost. Yet there seems to be more going on in
this poem than meets the eye. The conjuration parodies both the use
of Latin and elaborate ceremonial formulae, indicating an anti-Catholic
bias. If the poem is by James Wedderburn, a Protestant spokesman, the
Reformation leanings would not be surprising. The main mystery would
be why the satire was no stronger, nor more specific.

The eldritch fantasy poems seem to have been created solely for
entertainment, offering no didactic function at all. Sir David Lind-
say wrote that he read such "plesand" stories as "Off the reid Etin,
and the gyre carlyng" to the young James V, to help lighten his mood
and "comfort" him when "sorye."²⁸ Apparently these poems, pure non-
sense, were acceptable as a pleasurable escape, as delightful diver-
sions requiring no other moral justification for their use than the
recreation they offered. And we have at least one instance of such
diversions being read to the young, much as we read fairy- and folk-
tales to today's young. Moral considerations in literature were po-
tent, indeed dominant, but did not always take precedence.

Finally, we shall consider two mimetic transcripts related to the
fantasia poems, "I Yeid the Gate Wes Nevir Gane" and "Lichtoun's Dreame,"
the one anonymous and the other supposedly by one Lichtoun Monicus.

28. Lindsay, I, 5, the epistle to "The Dreame of Schir David Lindsay,"
lines 44-46.

Both poems are dependent on "I"-narrators chronicling comic encounters with the impossible.

Neither poem is a proper tale. They exhibit no character or plot development, they have no action to speak of, and it follows of course that no peripeteia occurs. Unlike the other fantasy poems, these two works almost wholly dispense with the techniques of misdirection, raising expectations in the reader's mind and then suddenly thwarting logical flow with deflationary absurdities, comic surprises. Instead, these poems are structures of impossibilia. Episodic progress consists in stringing together lists of occurrences or phenomena both impossible in the natural world and often ridiculous in themselves. For example, the narrator of "I Yeid the Gate Wes Nevir Gane" confesses

I saw ane guss virry a fox
Rycht far doun in 3one slak;
I saw ane lavrock slay ane ox
Rycht he vp in 3one stak.

(21-24)

It continues in that vein. Lichtoun dreams at one point that

We sailit in storme but steir or glass
To paradice, þe place quhair Adame was;
Be we approchit into þat port in hye
We ware weill ware of Enoch and Elye
Sittand on 3ule evin in ane fresche grene schaw
rostand straberries at ane fyre of snaw.

(37-42)

There is no narrative development in either poem, no logical connections between episodes. In fact, quite the reverse of logic is sought as a comic device. The narratives are constructs of wonder-full lists. These lists, composed of fanciful imaginings, are chocked full of "ferlies"--weird happenings, strange sights, and impossible persons, things, or places. As "Lichtoun's Dreame" recounts a nightmare, a threatening atmosphere prevails in it ("I socht my self and was sevin 3eir tynt," 56); and comic monstrosities, like the three man-swallow-

ing whales tethered in a meadow (77-82), figure more prominently in the list than appear in the other poem.

"I Yeid the Gate Wes Nevir Gane" takes its place firmly in the satiric anti-feminist tradition, both in technique and subject matter. The collection of marvels it recounts include the comic, such as the wren bearing "Vpoun his bak ane milstane braid" (37-40). But its wonders need not be intrinsically comic--as indeed many "ferlies" such as the dumb man speaking (5), dead man singing (6), and blind man reading (19) are not--yet still successfully contribute to the satiric argument: "Quhen all thir tailis are trew in deid / All women will be trew" (47-48). That is, the component "tailis," absurd or merely strange, are subordinate to the main anti-feminist joke, which comically requires the truth of these wonders to be the basis of placing trust in women's love. It makes no overall difference whether its components are absurd or strange. Story-telling techniques are likewise subordinated, for it makes no difference in what order the "tailis" are presented. The poet's purpose is not to relate a story but compile an extended and exaggerated list of marvels, trying thereby to provide a greater comic vigour when he turns finally to his ironic punchline. It is a style common to some types of folk-narrative, what today we might call a "shaggy dog story." However, structured thus--essentially a joke (leading, that is, to an unexpected verbal climax) instead of a story despite its narrative-like series of static episodes reported by an "I"-narrator--and providing the lame ending demanded by a mean-spirited convention, the poem lacks real comic potency.

Yet it does display two interesting minor features. The poem was intended for oral delivery, and the poet reveals an awareness of ironic

tones of voice, a technique of saying something in such a way as to signal the opposite of literal meaning: "3e may knaw by my talking eik / That this is no lesing" (6-7). He indicates a conspiratorial effect, a collusion with his audience or "in-joke" atmosphere, obviously intended in performance. Further, the poet provides a specifically Scottish setting for his observations, placing himself in the countryside and environs of Loch Lomand (17, etc). So through familiar animals and place names he gives to his audience an impression of immediacy and a flavour of truth. Both features may be seen as attempts by the poet to enliven what obviously by then must have become a very stale joke indeed.

"Lichtoun's Dreame" is the more imaginative of the two poems. Rather than confining itself to a specific locality, the poem is more wide-ranging in scope, involving world travel (28-31), contact with the moon and sun (48-53), and mythic persons and places like the ubiquitous "king of farye" (6) and "paradice" (38). It is more "realistic;" that is, its dream-context provides a believable setting for the comically oppressive impossibilia. It is more interesting in its use of imagery: the dreamer is bound hand and foot with "ane lang raip of sand" (8); he escapes sinking in "ane myre of flynt" by fluttering "vp with ane feddrem of leid" (11-14); and, a strangely arresting image, he believes himself "ferye of my 3outh: / I tuke my littill tae into my mouth / And kest my self rycht with ane mychtie bend" (15-17), to sample one small section of the poem.

Although generally parodying the dream-vision genre, the poem is not mainly dependent upon stock conventions such as the anti-feminist tradition demands. The final lines of the poem therefore come as more of a comic surprise. "Lichtoun's Dreame" is more like a real tale than

"I Yeid the Gate Wes Nevir Gane," in that it relates and develops the fantastic dream-adventures occurring personally to a central "I"-narrator who experiences a range of emotions like wonder, fear, delight, and relief. There is a progression through the various illogically connected episodes of the dream toward wakefulness. The poem commands a greater interest and power of illusion. The dream concerned is a comic phantasma, a prophetically insignificant nightmare.²⁹ The poem broadly burlesques serious allegorical dream-vision poems, such as Gavin Douglas' Palice of Honour, in which strange visions take on a symbolic importance. Lichtoun, comically agreeing with Galen that "a dream indicates to us the condition of the body,"³⁰ dashes any serious significance his dream and presumably all such dreams preserved in verse might have by attributing it to drink: "gentill aill is oft the causs of dremes" (90). His disclaiming explanation reinforces the nonsense of all that has gone before it.

I have already shown that, in general, the conflict poems-- the pastourelles, debates, and chansons de mal mariée--turn on comic role reversals. The peasant-brawls are more directly denigratory, depending a little on role reversals but a great deal more on the affirmation of stereotype conventions in order to fulfil comic expectations. The peasant characters are unfailingly ridiculous, clownish and cowardly, wanting knowledge of skill and harbouring a varied host of negative character traits. Individuals' "traditional" flaws (tailors'

29. Macrobius' Commentary on the Dream of Scipio, trans. William H. Stahl, (New York: 1952), 90.

30. Cf. Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences, (New York: 1926), 205.

cowardice, wenches' pretentiousness, millers' choleric aggressiveness, and so on) represent comic reversals of prudent and desirable behaviour. Such reversals likewise presuppose a background standard of normal, honourable, and ethical behaviour and beliefs (discussed below). To some extent the fantasia poems also turn on reversals of behaviour. But they depend more heavily on reversals of convention, comically upsetting logical, verbal, and generic textual expectations. They deliberately exploit illogicality; and verbal play is strong in this group of poems, although standard sexual puns, bawdy euphemisms, and comic double entendres are in evidence in the chansons d'aventure of the first group of minor poems. In addition to satirizing persons and groups (e.g. the Highlander, women), the fantasia poems burlesque and/or parody ideas (the creation of Man; death and salvation; religious rites and ceremonies) and literary genres (romance literature and folklore--"King Berdok," "The Gyre Carling"; saint's lives--"Kynd Kittok"; dream-visions--"Lichtoun's Dreame"; even Genesis--"The First Helandman").

The minor poems discussed are consistent in their comic anti-feminism, anti-clericalism, and mocking class prejudices. The laughter of moral and intellectual superiority is generally sought, which may, but does not necessarily, imply an aristocratic male audience. Such an audience was on the whole educated, and traditionally set the standards of fashion, thought, and behaviour for all of society. It is therefore not unexpected to find upper class standards used as the normal measure of social and intellectual behaviour, regardless of who actually wrote the poems. With some exceptions, the agents are often comic because they fail at imitating their betters, not because they fail as peasants (cf. the husbandman of Auchtirmwchty, who can-

not handle the "lesser" role as housewife). The men cut poor figures as lovers, ludicrous failures at amour courtois; friars are in all negative senses worldly, impious and lazy charlatans; peasants are braggarts, but inept, cowardly fighters, or barbaric outsiders like the first Highlander. The women are unladylike and unfeminine: gladly seduced, vain, aggressive, and faithless. In brief, the agents are inadequate knights and ladies, lacking intellectual skills, social graces, and nobility of character. Their failings may be comic to all classes of society, but the ideals inversely represented are courtly in origin.

By and large, these minor poems seem to have been written chiefly for amusement. Insofar as they are satiric, they are ridiculing instead of serious satires, laughing gently or scornfully at men and women, social and professional groups, ideas, or literary genres with little or no intention of correcting vices in society at large.

Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION

I have argued throughout the thesis for the existence of two distinct but interrelated branches of fictional narrative, stories and mimetic transcripts. Both kinds of structure can function in any genre and at any level of complexity; both have an equal aesthetic potential. As they share all the materials of narrative, there is often a very fine line which divides the two kinds. The basic distinction focusses on character development and thematic presentation. I have shown that stories, distinguished by peripeteia and often anagnorisis, are necessarily closer to drama than are mimetic transcripts. It follows that stories generally are more "dramatic" in conception, illustrative rather than elucidative; they demonstrate ideas by embodying them in plot, the moral choices of characters in action. Mimetic transcripts tend to be more discursive, exploring themes more openly within a fictional setting; frequently the agents' moral choices have been made before the mimetic transcript begins.

The dual purpose of poetry in the Middle Scots period accords with the classical and medieval ideal, dulce et utile. The best works satisfy both functions. If we had to characterize the structural emphases of stories and mimetic transcripts in terms of the ideal, we may say that where an imbalance exists stories tend to be consciously directed towards delight rather than information, aiming first to entertain; mimetic transcripts tend to reverse this pattern of emphasis in favour of utile, aiming primarily to educate, to explore an idea. Thus mimetic transcripts are often more "situational" in design--monologues, dialogues, quarrels, complaints, debates, parables, visions.

They tend to be setpieces, stationary single episodes raising and resolving a limited theme, narrow in scope if not smaller in scale. To borrow a musical analogy, poetic invention in mimetic transcripts strongly tends to take the form of theme-and-variations; stories are inclined to be symphonic in development, arriving at conclusions neither foreseen nor unexpected.

Controlled by theme or concept instead of character and plot, mimetic transcripts are naturally suited to fictional discourse, didacticism, allegory, propaganda, and, in a lighter vein, satire. Correspondingly, many of the Middle Scots satires adopt the structure of mimetic transcripts. Of course this is not to deny the brilliance of Henryson's Morall Fabillis as satires, stories teaching delightfully; but even here a substantial portion of the fables are devoted to thematic illumination, the descriptive moralitates. In other stories--Rauf Coilyear, "Kynd Kittok," Robene and Makyne, the fabliaux--humour or a general, relatively gentle mockery is much in evidence. Among mimetic transcripts a sharper, less sympathetic ridicule--wit--prevails. I have suggested throughout that this tonal difference, the degree of humane understanding, is partly due to the nature of stories as against mimetic transcripts. Both may employ limited caricatures and explore an identical theme. But agents who have clear motives, whose recognized success or failure results from free choices¹ and acts, enhance reader sympathy if not empathy while agents who are conceptually "pre-determined" or otherwise animated by thematic considerations do not.

In the hands of lesser masters, mimetic transcripts seem more

1. The element of chance in plot development aids the impression that agents have free choice, and may react or not to changing circumstances. Chance is almost invariably eliminated from mimetic transcripts, or it governs them wholly as in the parodic fantasia poems.

liable than stories to violations of mimetic propriety: for example, getting caught up in prolonged and static conversations, repetition of (dead) ideas, too-obviously contrived artifice, or mechanical inflexibility, all of which may be self-parodying or may break the fictive spell. Ineffective story-tellers usually commit different sorts of mistakes--supplying false motivation or relying on unbelievable coincidence, annoying or distracting the reader with too little or too much embellishment and detail, and so forth.

There are structural risks inherent in both forms, and they are not mutually exclusive. Despite the risks, mimetic transcripts provide a useful formal strategy for developing ideas, making an effective point or points in an entertaining setting, and offering a vehicle for ridiculing satire. It is impossible to measure poetic excellence comparatively, to contrast the successes of The Freiris of Berwik with, say, Dunbar's Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo, although we might wish to rank one above the other and believe we can find grounds for doing so. Given their different emphases, stories and mimetic transcripts at their best can provide a richly satisfying emotional and intellectual experience, a high aesthetic delight.

Few of the Middle Scots poems I have discussed may be described as pure entertainments. None are "meaningless" in the way that, for instance, Sherlock Holmes adventure stories have no significance beyond themselves. Reflecting the age, Middle Scots humorous verse-narratives are heavily weighted toward didacticism. Almost all of these poems employ varying degrees of ridicule (excepting perhaps Rauf Coilyear, which is nevertheless exemplary, and "Kynd Kittok"); yet few make use of ridicule for its own sake (as in "The Wowing of Iok and Iynny"),

that is, without higher ethical intent. Most of the poems, in short, can be construed as satiric. They seek the laughter of superiority, and frequently achieve it through ironic strategies, situational incongruity and verbal paradox, in which the ideal, the desirable, and the logical are systematically subverted, contrasted humorously with opposing or contrarious realities. Satire's function accords with the poetic ideals of the age. Its moral and recreational purpose, implicit or explicit, is to educate entertainingly, to present sinners, fools, and bad ideas in a ridiculous light and so discourage imitation or admiration. Occasionally this warning-function encompasses character assassination (e.g. Sempill's Bischof of St. Androis Lyfe, or Dunbar's Fen3eit Freir of Tungland), the destruction or emasculation of enemies through scornful laughter. Satiric emphasis, however, is usually general and impersonal, attacking groups or concepts but not naming names; and even "personal" enemies--Damian, Adamson--are portrayed as the enemies of God and society.

Orthodoxy and decorum prevail. Institutions such as the Church (until the Reformation), chivalry, courtship and marriage, royal government, or the (inequitable) class divisions of a hierarchical social structure are not criticized per se. They are in fact tacitly or overtly defended, and persons who fail to achieve or uphold the religious and (upper class) social ideals that these institutions advocate or represent are subjected to ridicule. Few satirists hesitate to criticize anyone, including the king. However, most of the satires and comic poems are concerned with the lower ranks of society and the private or domestic world in which relatively inconsequential social disorders occur. (Political satires, dealing with the public world and persons of consequence, are almost invariably serious in tone.)

Care is exercised in the act of criticizing, and by that I do not mean care in avoiding libel. Few satirists presume openly to judge their fellows as Sempill and Dunbar condemn Adamson and Damian: judgment is the prerogative of Heaven, laughter the privilege of men. The victims of satire are occasionally portrayed as criminals (Henryson's predatory wolf, the first Highlander, but usually false clerics such as Damian, Adamson, or Sym and his brother). Most objects of satire, however, are depicted as comic failures in terms of their social and sexual roles, intellectually and morally deficient. Most of the poems, in this sense, are behavioural comedies. Considered in absolute ethical terms, all of the satirists' victims are sinful, foolish and pitiable as regards their eschatological fates, opposites of the righteous, intelligent, and noble ideals of character.

The Middle Scots tradition contains "standard jokes" and perennially comic subjects. These include impotent males; perverse women (faithless, lecherous, aggressive, dissatisfied in all things); worldly, predatory, and hypocritical clerics, especially (Franciscan) friars; peasant ineptitude, ignorance, and graceless folly; abuse of the law, by its makers and administrators; "powerless" or misguided kings; and the difficulty of human love, the conflict of the sexes--courting as ill-disguised lust, marriage as a battlefield, family relations as a test of opposed wills, and so forth.

These jokes reflect traditional themes, generic conventions: love as an absurd four-letter word, a dissatisfaction, an affliction of reason in comic chansons d'aventure, pastourelles, debates, and complaints, comically falling short of amour courtois and higher religious principles (caritas); anti-clericalism, damning religious professionals who abuse the community's trust by failing to administer proper pas-

toral care; political satire, covering a multitude of social injustices; peasant foolishness and pretension, ridiculing discordant and inappropriate behaviour; and parodies and burlesques, mocking the forms, conventions, themes, logic, and rhetorical strategies of literary works themselves.

Summarized basically, the general theme of these satires may be described as social and theological conservatism, protecting through laughter society and individuals from chaos and damnation. Henryson's canon, anagogically-oriented in touching on all of the above themes, sets the pattern. He attempts to guide individuals to glory and to tightly weave together the fabric of society, threatened by habitual folly, worldliness, and disharmony, the forces of evil. Other satirists' worldviews are less comprehensive, and often more earth-bound: in Dunbar's courtly canon anti-feminist satire predominates; in Lindsay's, anti-clerical satire; and others are concerned with limited aspects of love, kirk, court, and country, public concerns.² A vision of the ideal world exists, and virtually all of the poems, using the tools of satire, reflect the poets' primary concern to preserve and improve society, to point the way amusingly toward terrestrial and divine salvation.

2. Even in lyric forms introspection is conspicuously absent. Poetry in Middle Scots is always a public, not a private, enterprise.

APPENDIX A: The text of The Freiris of Berwik

The first difficulty encountered in considering The Freiris of Berwik is textual. There are three extant versions of the tale. Each of them is relatively late, each is in places obviously corrupt, and each contains unique variant readings and unique lines. Further, there is no completely satisfactory modern edition of the poem in which these difficulties have been resolved.

Of the three surviving versions of the tale, in the Bannatyne and Maitland Folio MSS. and a unique early seventeenth century print, the Bannatyne copy is the earliest. The terminus ad quem of the poem is generally accepted as no later than 1540, when the monasteries and religious houses (described as flourishing in the poem) were dissolved by Henry VIII; this necessarily included English-controlled Berwik.¹ Bannatyne completed his manuscript in 1568, and though separated by decades from the original writing of the tale, his copy is the earliest known version of it. Though undoubtedly corrupt in a few places--significantly so in one respect (discussed below)--the Bannatyne copy seems relatively free from error and consistent in its rhymes, conforming for the most part to the decasyllabic couplets in which the tale was written. Nor has it been "reformed": Bannatyne retains un-

1. Ian B. Cowan and David E. Easson, Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland, 2nd ed., (London & New York: 1976), 116, 125, 136, and 140. The date of the tale is probably early sixteenth century: I have held discussions with Mr. A.J. Aitken, editor of the DOST, who feels--based on a study of the rhyme words--that the linguistic evidence points toward a composition date between 1495 and 1515. While this suggestion is not conclusive, it is a useful hypothesis, placing the poem in the reign of James IV.

changed the lines "And tawld þame talis of haly sanctis lyffis" (36), and "Our deir lady mery keip [me] fra sic cace" (88), as does, remarkably, the late printed edition, despite their "papish" taint. Maitland, on the other hand, "reforms" the lines to read "And tell yame talis of halie mennis lyveis" (M35), and "Our lord Iesus me sauf from sic ane cace" (M88; my italics throughout). No part of the narrative has been lost or expanded as in Maitland, and, against Maitland, Bannatyne conforms closely with the late printed edition. Because it is the earliest, complete, and unaltered version, a critical edition of the poem must begin with the Bannatyne copy as its substantive text.

The Maitland Folio, completed by 1586, is further removed in time from the original composition. Maitland's copy contains a high number of unique additions (eighteen lines not found in Bannatyne or the late print), marked variants, obvious "reformatiōns," and late sixteenth century spellings which occasionally alter rhymes. It is quite useful as a check against Bannatyne, and, acknowledging the source, use can be made of the Maitland text in a critical edition of the poem. But the Maitland copy is at once less reliable and at a further remove from the original than Bannatyne's, and should not be taken for the substantive text.

The sole surviving printed edition of the poem, The Merrie Historie, of the Thrie Friers of Berwicke (STC no. 7349+), was printed in 1622 by Edward Raban of Aberdeen.² Thought to have been lost in the nineteenth century, it was purchased at a Sotheby sale by The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, where it still remains. As David

2. I would like to express my gratitude to the Librarian at the Huntington Library for his generous cooperation in allowing me to use the hitherto unedited 1622 print. I make use of the relevant portions of this text in Chapter Three.

Laing noted, it is heavily anglicised;³ Raban, possibly following the lost 1603 Charteris edition of the poem, "modernized" his text, dropping Scots in favour of English orthography. But the text, though late by a century, obviously altered, and full of minor variant readings, conforms very nearly to the Bannatyne copy, and it offers a third check against which to compare the other two. Lines contained in two out of three texts can be taken with some degree of assurance to have been in the lost original draft. Unique additions, however plausible, must be viewed with a degree of suspicion.

One variant reading in particular, unfortunately in the substantive Bannatyne copy, presents a problem of textual interpretation which must be removed. In the Bannatyne text Friars Allane and Robert are styled "Iacobene freiris of þe quhyt hew" (24), and Abbot Johine is consistently "ane blak freir" (126). "Jacobins" was originally a French appellation given to the Dominicans, who established their first house at the Rue St.-Jacques in Paris, doubtless the place where Robert is supposed to have spent time studying (306). But the Dominicans were popularly known in England as "black friars" because of the black mantle or cappa (symbolizing penitence) worn over their white tunics and scapulars (symbolizing purity); the cappa was worn when the friars heard confessions, preached, met the laity, or left the priory.⁴ This would seem to make all the friars in the tale Dominicans, as has been suggested.⁵ However, it is obvious in context that the

3. David Laing, ed. The Poems of William Dunbar, 2 vols., (London & Edinburgh: 1834), II, 386.

4. William A. Hinnebusch, The History of the Dominican Order, 2 vols., (New York: 1966), I, 339-41.

5. Everett C. Johnston, "The Transformation of Friar Johine in 'The Freiris of Berwick'," SSL, 5 (1968), 57-59. The suggestion that by rolling in the flour in the meal trough Johine is changed from a black friar into a "Franciscan" is surely a desperate one.

friars are supposed to be of different orders. Asked to reveal his hidden "devil," Robert agrees, but with this proviso:

Freir robert said that "swa it cowl'd nocht be"--
 for sic caussis as he may weill foirse--
 "That he compeir in to our habeit quhyt,
 Vntill [our] ordour it wer a grit dispyte
 That ony sic vnworthy wicht as he
 in till our habeit Men sowld behald or se.
 Bot sen it pleissis 3ow þat ar heir,
 3e sall him se in liknes of a freir;
 In habeit blak it was his kynd to weir.
 (462-70)

Even in the Bannatyne text the schematization of "white versus black," or in terms of colour symbolism, "pure versus wicked," is clear. But of course Robert and Johine cannot belong to the same religious order. There is a possibility that Abbot Johine is an Augustinian, as Augustinians, present also in Berwick, wore black habits and were sometimes known as "black canons" or "black monks."⁶ But the Augustinian friars were modelled originally on the Dominicans and likewise followed a modified Rule of St. Augustine, and the textual problem of converting "blak freir" to "black canon" or "black monk" still remains. Supposing the Bannatyne reading to be correct by assigning Johine to the Augustinians is highly unpromising. The answer, I believe, lies elsewhere. The reading in the Maitland Folio text makes Johine throughout a "gray freyr," or Franciscan. As we have seen, an open animosity raged between the Dominicans and Franciscans; and finding these two at odds makes better sense than letting Bannatyne's reading stand and assuming Johine to be an Augustinian. Moreover, the reading "gray friar" is corroborated by the 1622 Print. Though the 1622 print initially in-

6. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, eds. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2nd ed., (Oxford: 1974), 111. Walter M. Hart, "The Fabliau and Popular Literature," PMLA, 23 (1908), 329-74, has assumed Johine is an Augustinian, without explaining his supposition.

troduces Johine as a "Black frier," at the crucial juncture cited in the passage above Johine is called a "Gray friar," the habit of the "fiend" unworthy to appear garbed as a Dominican. I therefore accept the reading of Johine as a Franciscan or "gray" friar,⁷ and must assume that Bannatyne either changed his copy throughout or, more likely, followed a text in which this error had already been committed.

No modern edition of the poem is completely satisfactory. David Laing,⁸ as Pinkerton had before him, takes the Maitland Folio for his substantive text, making no distinction between gray friars and black friars. John Small's edition for the Scottish Text Society is better,⁹ by far the closest thing to a scholarly edition of the tale. He bases his text on Bannatyne, but likewise exhibits no understanding of the difference between the mendicant orders. Further, besides making a substantial omission (after line 142), he takes great liberty with capitalization and punctuation. W. Mackay Mackenzie's notes to his edition--text based on Bannatyne--are excellent; but his edition is poor from a critical standpoint, making almost no distinction between the texts he uses for his readings, lacking virtually any attempt to account for variant readings. Worse, scenes in the tale which seem to him morally offensive--such as Alesone giving her "cunt...buffettis tway" (139-42) or Johine fearing for his testicles (M209-212)--Mac-

7. W. Mackay Mackenzie, ed. The Poems of William Dunbar, (London: 1932), 182-95, after Pinkerton (Ancient Scottish Poems, 2 vols., [London: 1786], II, 394-407), also accepts this reading, but with less substantial arguments.

8. Laing, op. cit., II, 372-73.

9. John Small, ed. The Poems of William Dunbar, 3 vols., STS 1st Ser. 2, 4, 16, 21, 29, (Edinburgh & London: 1883-88), II, 285-304.

kenzie expurgates. He casually dismisses them with the remark:

"from their coarseness and apparent character as an interpolation, [these lines] are here omitted."¹⁰

All modern editions of the tale appear in the collected works of Dunbar, among his attributions, on no better authority than Pinkerton's speculation, admitted guesswork. It should remain anonymous until more substantial arguments can be raised for including it in Dunbar's canon.¹¹ Finally, no modern edition, save Laing,¹² makes use of the 1622 print, comparing all three texts in preparing a critical edition of the poem. Such use would help decide and give authority for retaining or discarding variant readings. In my analysis of The Freiris of Berwik I have therefore gone back to the three extant manuscripts and print, using Bannatyne as my substantive text (line numbers refer to Bannatyne) and the other two copies for variant readings and emendations. Maitland readings are in brackets and 1622 print readings are italicized in brackets, unless cited otherwise in the footnotes. I have supplied punctuation; and all uses of italics are my own.

10. Mackenzie, op. cit., notes to line 136. My italics.

11. Since this writing Kinsley's edition of Dunbar was published. Kinsley has omitted The Freiris of Berwik from Dunbar's canon, along with several other dubious attributions.

12. Laing's rather informal collation, however, is of no use, as he takes Maitland for his substantive text, and Bannatyne agrees extraordinarily closely with the 1622 print.

APPENDIX B: Apologia Pro Comedia

We have seen reflected in Henryson's Prologue and Bannatyne's miscellany the "popular" idea that the higher place is always to be given to religious and philosophical verse over more imaginative literature, "feyneit fabillis" and works of that ilk. In the morally governed medieval universe it is easy to see why: the former deal directly with ultimate reality and man's highest truths, while the latter have to trade in lies--animate fictitious people in invented situations, make beasts talk, and so forth--in order to convey their truths. Hence the need, from Plato's day on, to defend the use of imaginative literature. We have also seen the lower value placed on works of "mere entertainment." This idea of a moral hierarchy in literature is a tenacious one, one which has faded only slowly and has not yet been totally superseded. Revolutionary shifts in taste and increasing critical sophistication have manifested themselves since 1800, but even Romantic and Victorian notions of the sublime--essentially a variant on the moral argument--and similar aesthetic developments have merely changed the criteria for literary hierarchies but not managed to do away with hierarchies altogether.

The critical grounds have shifted from moral to aesthetic concerns, but the traditional devaluation of "light" entertainment (comic, whether edifying or not) has carried through to our age, notwithstanding the present reverence for irony. Therefore I wish to add a word, I hope unnecessarily, regarding the value of comic poetry. Despite the regular homage paid to acknowledged comic masterpieces from certain of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales to Joseph Heller's Catch-22 I believe there is a lingering feeling among academics and others, at least subliminally, that man's humorous expressions are less weighty

and therefore less valuable than his serious ones, that tragedy is inherently more important than comedy because it is more earnest and more profound, almost "more true" if you will, and so worthy of greater esteem. Such a valuation is reflected in the very term "light verse," which can mean verse effecting lightness of mood, engaging laughter, but which is commonly taken to mean vers de société, "light" in the sense of trivial, frivolous, and unimportant.

I do not believe that there is any greater proportion of human truth to be found in earnest poetry than in humorous poetry. Both strive for a universal audience. Both can give us important insights into the writer, the reader, and the world they inhabit. Although the emotional effects sought for each are poles apart, in my view the key difference, I am unconvinced that sorrow-producing art has any greater intrinsic merit over joy-producing art, or that one is necessarily more thought-provoking than the other. In everyday life--wars and other momentous catastrophes aside--I find that humour is the more accurate reflection of the human condition, that a much greater profusion of comic experiences occur in the lives of men and women than tragic. It has been remarked that comedy is life-oriented, whereas tragedy is death-oriented, and it would seem perhaps that the reader's temperament determines which view is fundamentally most attractive.

I do not accept that human truth can be used as a valid criterion for evaluating the worth of humorous and serious poetry. Both can present equally valid views, depending upon the witness. Is then intellectual content an appropriate gauge of relative value? Part of the present case against the claims of humorous poetry, as I understand it, lies in its subject matter and presentation. Humour fails if it does not communicate its point immediately; and it can suffer in

repetition, for then the surprise, an essential element, is lost. Comic poetry, like jokes, depends in part on ready communication, which often leads it to be linear, direct, and "simple." Comedy takes its subject matter most commonly from ordinary life--examining ideas of morals and manners--and does not usually seem to plumb intellectual depths or treat themes of public significance. Linear directness and commonality of subject matter lead to the complaint of the triviality or the superficiality of humorous poetry. These conditions are not helped by the very nature of humour, that by definition we are not expected to take it "seriously." When humour does treat a potentially serious theme, for example death or human love, generally the desired effect is to deflate its seriousness as a human concern. Humour is not necessarily non-cerebral, for it can accommodate profound themes and deal with complicated ideas; indeed, its potential as a weapon or powerful persuasion or defensive influence has often been noted and tested. Yet even satire is frequently valued as much or more for its wit as for profundity of thought or truth. We are confronted with the paradox of success: when humour works properly it does so without our noticing it (that is, its mechanics and artifices do not call attention to themselves) and creates an atmosphere whereby we cannot take the subject seriously.

When successful, comic poetry lacks gravity, and often deals with everyday experience in a way calculated to reach its audience immediately. Therefore, in general, it appears intellectually simple. This does not mean that humour as a medium is incapable of intellectual substance, or that it cannot have underlying or symbolic meanings that are difficult to perceive. This does not mean that laughter is easily achieved or that humour is easy to write, any more than simple struc-

ture can be automatically equated with ease in composition. Nor does it follow that complex verse of a serious nature is necessarily better than humorous verse, although--technical merits aside--we may want to place a higher value on it for complexity of theme or structure. What is certain, from a critical standpoint, is that it is easier to write about complex earnest poetry than humorous poetry, complex or simple. Explication of complex writing can produce satisfactory readings of difficult passages or apparently obscure texts, or spark thoughtful debates; it seems to provide greater intellectual substance for thinkers and critics. On the other hand, analysing humorous poetry of any kind is less satisfactory, not because it is inherently easier to explicate or describe (in fact, it may be harder), but because studying the structure and pulling apart the mechanisms that produce humour seems sure to destroy its vitality and magic ("cold analysis spoils a joke"). Dissection seems sure to kill the patient. It is also unsatisfactory because of the tonal disparity: a serious tone accords with descriptions of and arguments about earnest work; but it seems fundamentally indecorous to apply a serious tone--the standard critical voice--to a comical subject. The clash of voices jars uncomfortably.

Obviously humorous poetry has built-in natural problems which make it difficult to treat seriously, and therefore to consider valuable. But earnest poetry has no real intellectual or thematic advantages. Both kinds of verse can explore, albeit to very different ends, complex and significant intellectual concepts; and even in clear cases of complex versus very simple there is no guarantee that complicated ideas are any more profound or emotionally communicative and satisfying than simple ones, only that they are more complex. Indeed, simple ideas often contain great wisdom and convey profound depth of feeling. Judgements on expression of truth or intellectual substance cannot perforce

lend either humorous or earnest poetry higher authority or value. Judgments of relative merit depend finally and in a very real sense on how one feels about either kind.

In one sense we are considering the merits of apples and oranges, two phenomena different, actually opposing, in kind; for humorous and earnest poetry--though both may try to teach and delight the reader--seek different emotional ends. They do not attempt to achieve the same emotional effects, and it therefore becomes impossible to judge humorous and serious verse as if they did. Humorous verse fails if it does not elicit laughter, gaiety, lightness of mood, happiness, perhaps joy. Earnest verse, for example a tragedy like Henryson's Testament of Cresseid, fails if it does not produce in a reader sorrow, pity, sobriety, awe. Each kind can in its own way offer entertainment and instruction, can be truthful and profound. But each kind seeks an opposite emotional response. I therefore think it neither reasonable nor prudent to judge one mode over the other as more truth-bearing, cerebral, emotive, or artful.

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